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"ROGER," OBSERVED FLIPPER FLYNN, "IT GIVES YOU JUST TEN DAYS MORE TO LIVE!"
AND HE POINTED TO THE INSCRIPTION.

OR, Knocking Out the Kidnappers.

BY JO PIERCE,
AUTHOR OF "TOM THISTLE," "SPICY JIM,"
"DENNIS DUFF," "BOB O' THE BOWERY,"
ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

HIS DOOM FORETOLD.

"HELLO! w'ot's the racket there? A man bein' done up, sure as you live. Old chap, you want a finger in that pie!"

It might be an attempt at murder, or only a street brawl, but, in any case, the speaker was interested. He had just turned the corner of a block, and saw a carriage in a side street with several men engaged in a fight near it. He was

young enough to be drawn toward such a scene, and away he went.

Before he reached the spot the fight was all over. There was a general dive for the carriage, and away it whirled with all the men inside except one. He had been flung down on the sidewalk, or knocked down; and there he lay, floundering about wildly.

The new-comer, who, plainly, had been the cause of the abrupt ending of the affair, was tempted to sound the alarm, but he was not sure the affair was serious enough to warrant it.

Just as he came up the man gained a sitting position.

"Hullo! mister," cheerfully saluted the rescuer, "how goes it?"

He was rewarded only with a glance.

"Fell among thieves, ain't you?"

This time the man made reply:

"I have, indeed."

"Honest?"

"Don't you see what the situation is?" impatiently asked the unknown, with an increase of attention.

"I kin see enough ter be sure it ain't pleasant fer you, mister," was the candid reply, "but that ain't a bill o' particulars. I'm after a diagram which shall give all that anybody else knows, an' more, too. I see you git knocked around in a way which must 'a' bruised yer pride an' yer anatomy, but further than that, deponent sayeth not."

During this address the stranger had reached out his hand, inviting his companion's aid, and with it had gained an erect position. He stood somewhat dizzily, but did not seem to be seriously injured. It was to be seen that he was well clad, and had the outward aspect of a gentleman. Furthermore, there was that about him which indicated English birth and blood.

"I still live," he decided, after trying his limbs.

"Sure!"

"Only for your timely arrival I might not be able to say that."

"Were they out fer yer life?"

"You saw how they hit me."

"Certain; but w'ot I'm tryin' ter git at is, was their object ter rob or ter kill ye?"

"I am robbed, doubtless. Further than that—"

The speaker paused and did not add what the additional facts were. To a certain degree he took his misfortunes calmly, for he was not excited to a violent degree, but it was clear he was hit hard by the calamity.

He hesitated and meditated, and then aroused. He looked keenly at his companion, and saw a boy of some sixteen years. He was not of aristocratic or dignified appearance, but he had a face, which was at once bright and good-humored. This was a recommendation in itself, and the man came to business.

"You must have seen a part of my trouble," he added.

"I think I observed that I did. You was skirmishing like Sitting Bull Injuns when I come onto the scene, but it struck me you was not gettin' your share of the fun."

"Boy, would you know any of those persons again?"

"Don't think I should. They got out o' sight like a free lunch with a tramp wootin' of it."

"You were unable to impress their faces on your memory?"

"Jes' so."

The stranger indulged in meditation again, and his total disregard for his bruises was the best evidence of the importance of the affair in which he had played such a passive, yet active part. After a while he directed his gaze toward the waiting boy once more.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Flipper Flynn."

"Eh?"

"Mister, I see you are a pilgrim in this glorious land o' freedom, so I may as well go into pertick'lers. I s'pose I hev some other handle than that I whispered, but it ain't in active use. Flipper Flynn is the name I sail under, an' it ain't uncommon in these parts. Half o' the men an' kids in New York are fixed out on the plan; it's Uncle Sam's style, an' better than imitatin' other folks. See?"

"I will humor your fancy, for it is not a matter that interests me especially. You have discovered that I am not an American. Well and good; it is a fact that I'm an Englishman. I am in your country on a most sacred errand. It is to find a brother of mine who, I fear, has met with foul play. He came here some time ago, but all word from him has ceased. Just why I think he has met with trouble I need not now explain, but I came here to look him up, and

get him out of whatever difficulty he was in. Beyond doubt I have chanced upon his enemies, but you have seen the result—instead of helping him, I have myself been nearly made a victim."

"Oh! when our genooine Uncle Sam crook gets down to biz, he's a hustler," agreed Flipper, with dignity.

"You don't sympathize with him?"

"Me? Bless you, no!"

"Very well. Now, I am so nearly a stranger here that I see the need of having a guide and helper. For such a person I am willing to pay a good round sum. Do you want the job?"

Flipper Flynn was by this time interested in the affair, and he did not let the chance slip to get further into the secret. He replied with some dignity that he was not accustomed to work for a living, but was always ready to do a gentleman a good turn. Hence, he was not averse to helping his new acquaintance, "if it could be done without too much injury to his personal business."

The stranger had used good judgment in sizing the boy up, and, believing he had found just the helper he needed, he brightened perceptibly and grew confidential.

"My name is Roger Hethington," he went on, "and I am from an excellent family on the other side. As before intimated, I am on here to find my brother. He came on some time ago, and I received word from unknown parties that he was held for ransom. Of course I hastened to his aid, and now I'm trying to accomplish my work in the face of many difficulties. For some reason the crooks fail to let me meet them, and I am working at a disadvantage. This morning I received word from a woman, or some one claiming to be such, that, if I would meet her, I could learn of Lionel—that's my brother. I did meet her according to contract, but it was not a square deal; as you have seen, I met more than I anticipated. She had a gang of ruffians with her, and I was used in a way not to my liking."

"I don't blame ye fer objecting ter sech a deal. It was tough on yer anotomy," the boy agreed, readily. "So it was them you run up ag'in, was it?"

"I think so, but I'm not sure. They did not say so, but after a little roundabout talk on her part, the men put in an appearance and evidently tried to maim or kill me."

"What's yer next move?"

"Just what I want to know. I want your advice."

"Git a detective."

"I am reluctant to take such a purely selfish person into my confidence," objected Hethington. "If this thing can be done quietly, it would satisfy me a good deal better."

Flipper Flynn did not gain confidence in his companion's judgment, but it was Roger's affair, not his; and he was not disposed to argue against a scheme which would put money into his pocket, instead of a detective's. He kept this in mind and replied:

"Mebbe we kin develop man-buntin' ability that would puta reg'lar ter the blush. I am quite a looker-around, myself. I should hev mentioned that my full name is Flipper Flynn, the Street Patrol. You see, I make it a practice ter pop up when there's fun or fightin'; not that I do any scrappin'—fer it ain't in my line."

"Come to my room, and let us talk this over."

"Heave ahead, an' I'll be in at the finish."

The Street Patrol was growing interested in this matter. He had heard of young Englishmen being made victims of by New World sharpers before, and as there generally was a history back of the attack, there was reason to suspect it would not be time lost to keep Hethington company in his investigation. True, he was not warmly impressed in his favor, but he was worth cultivating.

It was not a long journey to his room, and they were soon inside. Roger's good clothes had led Flipper Flynn to expect a house and room in keeping therewith, but in this he was disappointed. The quarters did not rise above the medium grade, and indicated lack of money or a modest taste.

Hethington looked around and exclaimed:

"Hello! what's this?"

He was looking at a package which stood in a corner.

"Guess you've got a Christmas present," the Patrol suggested.

"I don't know why I should have any such thing come. I will look into it at once."

The package was wrapped in an ordinary brown paper, thick and heavy, and did not appear to be of much solidity, but when Roger lifted it, he found that the contrary state of affairs existed. There was substance there, and he wondered more than ever. The Patrol had a faculty

for getting interested in things, and he gave his aid to unwrap the contents. It proved to be still a mystery, and he swung it up on end and leaned it against the wall near the window.

"Merciful heavens!" gasped Hethington, "What is this?"

He recoiled as if he had received a blow, and then remained staring at the object in startled amazement.

"Well, that's a corker!" added the Patrol, half-unconsciously.

The comment seemed well made.

The thing was a gravestone, and on the side was this inscription:

"ROGER HETHINGTON,

DIED IN NEW YORK,

August 10, A. D. 1889."

Surely, it was a ghastly gift to receive, and Roger found no words ready in which to express his opinion. He had met the assault on the street like a man of nerve, but he had too much at stake to look with composure on such a gift as this.

"Roger," observed Flipper Flynn, "it gives you just ten days more to live!" and he pointed to the inscription.

"I see," mechanically replied the recipient.

"It ain't a joke?"

"Unfortunately, no."

"Then you want ter look a little out, by hickey!"

"Unless we can beat them out, I am a doomed man!" Roger cried.

CHAPTER II.

THE PRISONER OF THE DEN.

"You hustle around and get that work done, or I'll take a club to ye, lazy-bones!"

It was not the most encouraging way to be asked for service, but Betty Gray was used to it. Betty did not fill a very aristocratic niche in life, and many would have said she was not of much account, but she had to work hard, and who, thus occupied, is a trivial factor?

It is the workers in the hive that get the honey.

Betty proceeded to "hustle," according to orders. This meant she must sweep and dust with all the vigor of her young arms, and she never shirked matters. She went up to the top floor and entered a square room. It had one tenant, a man of about twenty-five years. He sat in a big chair, with a dressing-gown thrown around him. Betty's entrance brought a more cheerful look to a face which, while prepossessing in many ways, had been dull the moment before—almost indicative of a weak mind.

"So you've come, Sunshine?" he spoke, quickly.

"I'm here, sir," Betty admitted, practically.

"And you bring sunshine. Betty, I have been wanting to see you. I want to know who I am!"

"Dear me, sir, I can't tell you."

"I am aware of that. You never saw me until of late, and it isn't to be expected you would know about me; but I want to see if we can't find out between us. Now, here I am, a wreck on the sea of life; a mariner without a compass, as I may say. Who am I? Where do I belong? How did I lose my mental balance, and become such a wreck as you see me? You can't tell me this, eh?"

"No, sir."

"Never heard any of the angels who run this ranch tell my story?"

"No, sir."

"What do they call me?"

"Isaac Moss, sir."

"Humph! Pretty name to call a man by, isn't it? It's just as likely to be mine as Jacob Gress is. It won't go down. Now the fact that they have a name all ready to fit to me, like a Bowery clothing-dealer with a supply of coats, looks bad to me. If they professed total ignorance I should not suspect them; but this Isaac Moss business don't impress me favorably. Eh, Betty?"

"Yes, sir," agreed Betty, with her usual docility.

The young man meditated. As his words indicated, he was one who had the power of being cheerful under disadvantageous circumstances. Except for that he would never have talked so lightly to Betty, for he fully realized that he was in a bad fix; but he kept his courage and hoped for better things.

Betty paused in her sweeping to look pityingly at him and ask:

"Can I do anything for you, sir?"

"If I had been able to answer that question to the point as many times as you have asked

it, we should be out of the woods, now. Unfortunately, I have always been obliged to reply in the negative. What can we do, when we don't know whether I am Isaac Moss or John Smith?"

"I don't think *that's* your name."

"Candidly, I don't, either. Let me look back: I came out of a severe illness, and found myself here. Oddly enough, I could remember nothing as to my past. I did not recognize any one around me; all were strangers as far as I could tell, though the fact that I could remember nothing whatever of the past would have made it possible that I might have faced my own brother and not known him."

"Did you ever have a brother?"

"Just what I wish I knew. Did I? That's the question. Did I ever have anybody but myself?"

"You *must* have, sir."

Isaac Moss laughed. Betty and her serious, practical way of taking matters, always amused him.

"Agreed! Well, as I was saying, I failed to get any light from my companions, here. They told me I had come here, given the name of Isaac Moss, remained two weeks, paying my board like a good fellow; and then fallen desperately sick of something—I never have been able to find out what. When I got on my feet I was absolutely no good. I was sick in body, and my head was even worse off. My past was gone; utterly gone. That, as far as I know the gentleman, is the history of Isaac Moss."

The speaker smiled, but Betty did not. She had an idea that this lightness of spirit on his part, which she had seen before, indicated a state of mental aberration, and saw no joke in it. She shouldered her broom.

"I'm done, sir."

"Oh; are you? Happy Betty!—you live in the domain of your broom, and, doubtless, have no ambition or thought beyond that department of life's battle-field."

"I ain't half so much of a clod as you take me to be!" Betty retorted, resentfully.

"A clod? Bless me, I never thought of considering you one. I beg your pardon, my girl; you are a friend whom I prize highly, and who has been very kind to me. You are a trump card, Betty. I hope I haven't offended you?"

"Oh! no, sir; I know you are my friend."

"That's it exactly. And now, Betty, won't you oblige me by looking into my affairs a little, and seeing if you can get any pointers out of the dragons who run this shop? The idea is strong in my mind that they know more about me than they let on. Can't you pump them on the dead quiet, and see if they are really fooling me?"

"I'll do my best, sir."

"Good, my girl! You and I will hang together, whatever comes. If I prove to be a prince in disguise I'll remember you handsomely. Get all the information you can, and you and I will divvy at the wind-up. How is that?"

Betty was good-hearted, and she really liked Isaac Moss, so she was not backward in agreeing to the proposal. She did not expect to learn that Isaac was a prince in disguise, but she was quite willing to help any one who was in need.

She promised in due form, and the young man did not suspect how much of a load she was taking upon her young shoulders. She went out, and proceeded down-stairs.

On the lower floor she met Mrs. Jacobs, who was the reputed head of the house, and a person of some peculiarities.

Now, Betty was not considered a brilliant star in the intellectual firmament, but, like many another person, she was underrated. She was capable of more than she was credited with, and she was about to make an assault on Mrs. Jacobs's secrets when all her plans were changed by a ring at the door. She was curtly told to answer the bell, and proceeded to do so. A flashy-looking man was standing there, and he inquired for the landlady.

Mrs. Jacobs was near, and she took the matter out of Betty's hands with singular haste. She hastened to take charge of the caller, too, and conducted him to the parlor without delay.

Betty looked wise.

"I wonder why it is he comes here so often since Isaac has been with us?"

With this mental question, she first looked sharply at the parlor, and then moved to the door. Mrs. Jacobs would have been amazed had she seen her scrub-girl deliberately act the listener.

It was new work for Betty, but she soon decided she was to be rewarded. There was conversation within: she became a listener.

"How is he getting on?" asked a masculine voice.

"No change," Mrs. Jacobs replied.

"As foolish as ever, eh?"

"He does not get the past back, nor have any gleams of reason. At all times he is perfectly docile. This makes it very easy for us."

"Yes; but does not speak well for the future, if we should want him to grasp that lost past. If he has degenerated into a complete wreck, we have done our work too well."

"Oh! I think he will come around all right. The drug was warranted to us, and ought not to fail."

"Ought not, does not go. If we have made the man an idiot, he will never be of any use to us; that's all. He ought to begin to pull himself together, if he's going to at all."

"That's a fact."

"How often do you see him?"

"I go up every day."

"Who else?"

"Abe, my husband; and the girl."

"I've noticed her. So you allow her to be around him?"

"Why, of course. Don't look so surprised; Betty ain't capable of doing any harm if she was paid for it. The girl is a dunce, or next door to a know-nothing."

Listeners hear no good of themselves, it is said. It was so in this case, as Betty fully realized. She was not a revengeful person, but her eyes flashed at these uncomplimentary remarks.

"We'll see about that!" she muttered.

"I'm beginning to get uneasy about this matter," confessed the visitor. "You will remember I was never satisfied with your ranch, here, as a refuge. Now, how about your other place?"

"That's all right."

"I am of the opinion it is safer than this. I wish you would speak to Abe, and see what he thinks about moving Moss to said house."

"Abe is away, just now; but what of it? I am boss here, and don't you forget it. If you want any change, I am the one to talk to."

"All right," returned the man, laughing. "I had as soon deal with you as any one else. Shall we change the prisoner to-night? Once we get him to the other den, he may as well bid good-by to the world until we see fit to let up on him."

"Perhaps it is safer, and if you say the word, off he goes. If we move late at night we shall be safe enough."

"Enough, then. We will carry out the plan. I'll have a carriage here in due time, and all can be done on the dead quiet."

Betty listened further, but heard nothing which gave her light as to the mystery of Isaac Moss's life. He was the prisoner of the people of the house; that was all Betty knew, or could make out.

When a stir in the room indicated that the caller was going, the girl retreated to a safe distance.

"So I don't know nothing?" she muttered, resentfully. "My lady, I have known folks to make a big mistake; perhaps you have made one, now. The 'know-nothing' may prove dangerous, after all."

Betty was wronging herself by giving these words a thought. She had more of intelligence and quick wit than even her best friend, Isaac Moss, suspected; but these qualities never had been given a chance to assert themselves. Early left an orphan, she had been a veritable slave all her life. She had scrubbed for Mrs. Jacobs, and never had the shadow of a reward; and long-continued abuse and neglect had naturally made their mark.

Now, light was dawning upon her.

"I'll go to Isaac," she declared; "and if he can get strength to stand, we'll see who comes out ahead!"

CHAPTER III.

EVIDENCE IN RED.

FLIPPER FLYNN shook his finger at Roger Hethington.

"Now, don't you get cast down," the Street Patrol advised. "What if you have got a notice to quit this earthly sphere ten days hence? You ain't obliged to do it, be ye? Ef you hev a tenement in New York, you've got to live up ter laws o' the State you hang out in; but you can't be dispossessed from the world jest 'cause you hev made yerself obnoxious ter some critters. Brace up, Roger! I wouldn't die, ef I's you. Nary time!"

This advice had due effect.

"I am not a coward," the Englishman replied; "but that thing don't look pleasant."

He pointed to the gravestone.

"Right you are, my friend. Sech a gift is a corker, I will admit, but you are still in it."

"I am," Hethington declared. "The thing came so suddenly, I was upset. Now, I am calm, again. Let us look into the matter."

They went forward to the gravestone. The inscription, which gave Roger just ten days to live, was well and neatly done. It spoke of the event as one already past, yet the date was one of the future; but he had the novel experience of standing there and reading the record of his allotted fate.

If the plans of his enemies went not awry, he was not long of the earth. A grim-appearing thing was the stone to him, but the Patrol proceeded to look at it critically.

"Kind of a cheap concern fer a serious subject. This ain't no royal marble, but jest a fake on the article. It is made out of white oiled-cloth, or something o' that sort. See?"

The statement was correct. The cloth was stretched over a frame of wood, and was a "cheap concern," but this did not change the main facts of the case. It was there, and the warning was just as plain as if put on more pretentious a surface, and engraven instead of painted.

"Can you advise anything?" asked Roger.

"I kin; and the first thing is ter find out how this vallerable gift come ter you."

"True! I'll attend to it at once. Remain here, and I will go down and see the landlady."

He went, and the Patrol killed time as well as possible while he was gone. When he returned he shook his head seriously.

"No use. The thing was brought by an expressman, but they tell me there is no clew to his identity."

"Then we are out, there. What else have you in mind?"

"I rely upon you for that."

"Mister, I am a genuine Uncle Sam youth, and that means I am a yard or more wide, an' cut bias; but I ain't infallible. I don't claim ter be. You ain't told me enough about yer case ter put me fully on."

"You shall know all. My brother, Lionel, came to America to see the country. All word from him ceased, but when I wrote for information, an answer came from unknown parties. They boldly announced that he was a prisoner with them, and held for ransom. I came over, but failed to get tidings from the crooks, as they had promised. Then came word from a woman that, if I would meet her, I should have the news I desired. I came; you have seen the result."

"Didn't she let on anything?"

"No."

The Englishman answered promptly, but Flipper Flynn's growing doubts were not lessened. He did not feel sure he was getting all the facts in the case. If anything was being kept back, it was not a desirable job to be assistant to Roger.

"From a word the woman let drop, I have an idea we might with profit go to a house known as the Cozy Cove," added the Englishman, after a pause. "Will you accompany me?"

"I reckon I will; though it's a resort not as safe as a church."

For one so unsophisticated, Roger did not show much zeal to learn what the Patrol could tell of the Cozy Cove. He asked no questions, but prepared to go. They went out, and were soon at the door of the establishment so alluringly named.

It was simply, as far as could be seen, a hotel of the run-down, seedy order. Flipper Flynn knew it of old. He could not say it had a doubtful reputation, but it was the resort of sporting-men, and he had seen those pass its doors who were not unlike sharpers and crooks in appearance.

Hethington entered without hesitation. Once in the main room, however, he began to show some doubt. He looked around carefully, noting all who were present.

The Patrol awaited the result without anxiety. If he was to be kept in the dark, his new acquaintance could play his cards to suit himself. One of those present seemed to interest Roger, and he finally walked over to him and spoke in a low voice.

Now, Flipper was sure he was not wanted in this conversation, but he labored under the impression that, if he was to be assistant to any one, it was his privilege to know what was going on.

He did not hesitate to get near enough to overhear the talk.

"Friend," began Hethington, "were not you present when I was in here before?"

"I remember seeing you," the stranger admitted.

"Do you remember who was with me?"

"Mr. Dunning, wasn't it?"

"Was that his name?" asked Roger, eagerly.

"He is a gentleman with a strikingly red mustache, and hair scarcely less high-colored."

"The very same. Now, can you tell me where I would be likely to find him?"

"Beyond doubt, over at the billiard-room; or up in his room."

"So he rooms here?"

"Yes."

Thanking this timely informant, the Englishman turned away. He was evidently bound to see Dunning at once, and Flipper, who had come to the conclusion to have no more to do with the affair, changed his mind and decided to take in one more act in the drama.

The billiard-room was at the rear of the hotel, and to that place Roger went at once.

"You're a wily rat, mister," soliloquized the Patrol, "but don't you get the notion inter yer head that you kin hev me fer a helper, and keep me in the dark. It might do in some cases, but you are rubbin' elbows with crooks, now. They ain't the style o' men it is safe to monkey with. If you an' I run in pairs, I come inter the whole lay-out."

Unconscious of the rebellion in his own camp, Hethington proceeded to business.

The man he wanted was not in the billiard-room, but on inquiring for Mr. Dunning, he was carelessly informed by the man in charge of the tables that Dunning's room was to be reached by going up the back stairs.

"Number 23," he added.

Roger turned to Flipper.

"Wait for me here," he directed.

"Mister, you want ter look a little out."

"I know; it's all right."

Answering impatiently, he hastened up the stairs.

"Don't know whether it's all right or not," mused the Patrol. "You are runnin' this circus, but the show may be w'ot you don't look fer."

Believing that he, at least, could afford to be philosophical in the matter, the speaker sat down and proceeded to wait for Roger. Time passed and he did not come. Finally, each minute brought the growing impression that the matter was becoming suspicious.

The Patrol might have been forgotten or thrown over, but the Englishman had seemed very much pleased to get him as a recruit.

Meditating on the point, Flipper ended by making a bee-line for Number 23. No one objected, or, indeed, seemed to notice his movements.

The door was one of several which opened off from the hall. The Patrol knocked. There was no answer.

"Come out o' that!" Flipper muttered.

"You've got ter show up."

He thumped briskly this time, but no answer was returned. His audacity was equal to the requirements of the case. He opened the door. He saw a comfortable apartment, and that was all; no one was visible.

"Well, now, that's odd! Kin Roger hev give me the dump? Don't think it, by gum."

For several moments he stood and looked in silence. The empty room would not have impressed him so forcibly had not he been in just the mood to doubt; he had started in on suspicions before the disappearance was known.

Hesitating for a while, he entered the room.

"Bad biz fer you, old chap, ef you git ketched. Nobody would believe you was a square gent, ef you got dropped on in this."

The thought was enough to make him draw back, but as he did so something not before seen caught his attention. It caused him to start back abruptly.

"Great guns!" he exclaimed.

For on the white spread of the bed he had seen a strange red stain. He touched his finger to it.

"Blood!"

He whispered the word in a husky manner. Blood!—and fresh and wet! The discovery upset his usual coolness. When he took his gaze from the spot it was to look around with apprehension. Perhaps danger menaced him, too.

Did this stain point to missing Roger?

CHAPTER IV.

MYSTERY IN ANOTHER ROOM.

FLIPPER FLYNN recovered his nerve somewhat. He looked around the room for some sign of a struggle. None was to be seen. All was as much to rights as if the chambermaid had just finished putting the place in order.

"Ef tragedy's been done, it was a neat stroke," he commented.

For a moment he was inclined to doubt his

own opinions, but one does not like to abandon a theory. He became more settled in his belief.

"Roger has got it in the neck, sure. Yes; an' I'm likely ter bring up the same way, ef I don't get a move on. I'll move!"

Deciding thus he left the room, but was not in time to avoid the encounter he feared. At the door he met an old gentleman. Now, Flipper was too shrewd to act the skulker, and he held his head well up as he tried to pass on in silence.

This he was not able to do. The old gentleman stopped squarely in front of him.

"Is Mr. Dunning in?" he asked.

"The place is keepin' itself, jest now. All out."

"I wanted to see him."

So did Flipper, but he was willing to defer revealing the fact. He intended to say farewell to the vicinity without delay, but just then the door of the next room opened. A lady's dress was briefly seen, but she retreated abruptly on catching sight of others.

The man exhibited surprise, and directed:

"Wait a bit, my young friend; I may want to see you further."

He opened the door, himself, and the Patrol decided to delay. He had seen an invisible something, as it were, in all this which was worth looking into.

The old gentleman did not close the door after him, and Flipper improved the chance to use his eyes and ears.

Standing near the window was a young woman. She was neatly dressed, and, in every way, had an appearance of respectability which was hardly to be looked for there. So might a Murray Hill heiress have appeared, thought the Patrol.

But this did not long hold his attention. Something else was there to call wondering notice. She was agitated; painfully agitated; and her eyes were full of undried tears. Evidently, she had just had a fit of violent weeping.

"Why, Viola, what is the trouble?" the old gentleman demanded, in shocked surprise.

She struggled to regain composure.

"Nothing," she returned.

"Nothing, and you in such a mood! That is impossible. Have you heard bad news?"

"I have heard none."

"Then what does this mean?"

Thus far she had kept up the conversation with a degree of fictitious composure, but she had reached the limit of endurance. She burst into tears which were accompanied with hysterical emotion.

"Bless me!" her companion murmured, still more amazed.

Flipper felt rather guilty of standing there to witness what was, perhaps, a grief in which he could have no possible interest; but the fascination was not to be resisted. These persons, or one of them, at least, knew Dunning. If he wanted to work for Roger Hethington, no chance must be neglected to get on in that matter; so Flipper kept his position and looked innocent and calm.

"My dear," the old gentleman persisted, "you break my heart with your distress. If you will be calm and tell me—"

Up sprang the girl, and passionately she exclaimed:

"Will you let me alone? Am I a clod that you beat upon me thus? I want to be let alone!"

Her companion gazed at her in a dazed, dumfounded way. Evidently, he was not used to hearing such words from her lips, and the outburst left him speechless.

It was she who first recovered her calmness. Her anger went as suddenly as it had come, and she remorsefully implored:

"Father, forgive me! I must have been mad. I don't know why I spoke thus; I did not know what I was saying."

"My dear, far be it from me to blame you at this time. I can plainly see you are in deep sorrow, and I have no word of censure. But tell me what the trouble is."

Viola stood in silence. The explanation he craved did not come. There was a long lull, and Flipper was of the opinion it would grow longer before Viola divulged her grief. Whatever it was, she plainly was not inclined to make it public property.

"You say you have no bad news?" pursued the father.

"I did say so."

"Then what can so distress you?"

She hesitated, repressed another inclination to break into weeping, and then went forward and put her arms around his neck.

"Father, don't let us say anything more about this, now," she urged. "You are too wise to

heed the outbreak of a foolish girl. Let it go at that, for I assure you it is—nothing!"

The statement was well planned, but poorly executed. It would have deceived no one; her grief was so very apparent, a child would detect the insincerity of her final statement.

Her father shook his head. He seemed to realize that it would be useless to say more, and, after a little meditation, he turned to Flipper Flynn and gave him a secret sign to follow him out of the room. This the latter was not reluctant to do. Once in the hall, the old gentleman asked in a whisper:

"Do you understand this?"

The Patrol knew of no reason why he should, but he replied with due gravity that he was unable to grasp the meaning of it.

"It is very unlike Viola; I don't see into it at all. She is usually of a very happy disposition. It is beyond my comprehension."

"Do you live here, mister?"

"No; we came only a few days ago. You see, Viola is to be married."

"Oh! is she?"

"Yes, and to your friend, Mr. Dunning's brother, Harold Dunning."

Flipper Flynn put two and two together, and began to suspect that there was, perhaps, good reason for Viola's sudden emotion. Had she heard something in the next room which was responsible for her mood?

"We live in St. Lawrence county," went on the old gentleman. "I am a retired farmer, and my name is Erastus Stowell. Viola is my daughter. A year ago, a young man came up from the city to board for the summer. This was Harold Dunning. He met Viola, and they at once became interested in each other. The result of it was, they are engaged in matrimony. Harold is a very busy man, and he suggested that my daughter come down here to be married. He said he would send a friend to escort her down, but, old as I was, I could not think of letting my only child be married without my being present. I informed him I would attend to that, and here we are. When we got to the depot, however, Harold failed to meet us as he had planned, and we would have been in a fix but for one circumstance."

Flipper thought he saw how matters were moving, and he hazarded the guess:

"Harold sent a friend, I s'pose?"

"No. Once, when up country, he gave Viola a card which he thought was his, but it proved to have the name and address: 'Gilbert Dunning, Hotel Cozy Cove, New York.' Of course he explained that this was his brother, and the fact that Viola kept the card gave us the only clew to what to do. We came here—"

"And Mister Harold ain't showed up?"

"Not yet, but he is coming. Your friend, Gilbert, received us cordially, and sent word to his brother. He has been very kind. Now, we are expecting Harold every minute."

"An' Viola in tears!"

"That is just what worries me. It will not be a pleasant way for him to be received, if he finds her in tears; and how to prevent it, I don't know. What can be the matter with her?"

"Mebbe Harold has been here, already."

"Then where is he, now?"

"That's where the conundrum comes in," wisely informed the Patrol.

Flipper did not care to speak all that was in his mind. He imagined he could see a good ways into this matter. If Viola's lover was the brother of Gilbert Dunning he might be a rascal of the first water, and that was just what Flipper had marked him down.

He had heard of gay young men from the city going to the country and making love to unsophisticated girls, before. Sometimes they were only triflers; sometimes they were city crooks. If Harold was of the latter order, it had undoubtedly disarranged his plans not a little to have old Mr. Stowell decide to accompany his daughter to New York. All this was to be studied out, but what meant Viola's agitation.

This could only be explained, the Patrol thought, by the presumption that she had in some way got an inkling of the truth.

Mr. Stowell was old, and he did not grasp these facts and suspicions at all.

Footsteps sounded in the hall; Flipper looked up and saw a stylish young man approaching with a quick, light tread. Stowell saw him, too, and an expression of relief overspread his face.

"Here's Harold, now!" he cried.

The young man's face beamed in return.

"My dear Mr. Stowell, is it you?" he very cordially exclaimed. "I am most delighted to see you. And Viola—where is she?"

CHAPTER V.

A STARTLING STATEMENT.

SUSPICIOUS Flipper Flynn thought there was a good deal of the city "confidence man" in this address, and in the warm way in which Harold Dunning grasped Stowell's hand; but the latter was as free from doubt as ever. He met the new-comer in equal cordiality. For a moment he forgot the trouble in the next room, and was only recalled to consciousness by the inquiry for the girl.

Then his face suddenly grew grave. He hesitated what to say, but Harold took the responsibility from him. His gaze wandered to the number on the door, and he exclaimed:

"Here's the room now. I'll surprise her!"

He opened the door without ceremony and went in.

"Howlin' hyenas!" muttered Flipper; "he's in fer it, now!"

Eager to see the result, the speaker pressed forward to the threshold. He was in time to see the whole drama.

Harold and Viola were face to face. His expression was eager, while the surprise of his sudden entrance had not yet given her chance to assume a definite look for the occasion. But the visitor moved forward quickly.

"Viola," he cried, "I have come, at last! This is most awkward and unpleasant, but I can explain it all. I am much chagrined, I do assure you."

His hands were outstretched to grasp hers, and she did not refuse the reception, but her own hands lay like lifeless things in his clasp. She was silent and passive.

"I got to you at the earliest possible moment," he went on. "I had to be busy just when I least wanted to be. One who is a hired man can't be his own boss, you know; and—"

Harold stopped short. He had, at last, seen that he was not getting a warm welcome.

"Why, what is wrong?" he added, anxiously; and if the anxiety was fictitious, it was well feigned.

Viola had withdrawn her hand, though not roughly, and she now seemed to make an effort to recover her calmness. The attempt was a failure, and her endurance suddenly gave way. She dropped into a chair, covered her face with her hands and burst into tears in the same violent way before observed by two of those present.

Harold looked amazed.

"What does this mean?"

It was to Mr. Stowell he addressed the question, and that gentleman found himself compelled to come to the front.

"Well, you see it's like this—or, at least, you don't see. I mean, I don't see!"

The good man floundered around over an explanation he was not capable of making, and came to a full stop. Harold gazed at him in what seemed to be genuine perplexity.

"I referred to Viola's grief," he explained. "What has gone wrong with her? I trust there is no bad news?"

Stowell stroked his gray beard and looked at Viola as if imploring her to come to his aid, but she did not do so; she kept up her almost convulsive sobbing. Seeing that he must fight his own way, the father frankly confessed:

"I shall have to refer you to Viola. Much as I would like to make all clear, I can't do it, for I am as much in the dark as you. Viola seems all broken up, but why, I have not been able to find out."

Harold looked perplexed, but settled down to the task of solving the mystery. He assumed a lover's ways; he put his arm around her waist, and tried to get the explanation from her. This was not easy, but she finally recovered enough to curb her violent emotion.

She raised her head and spoke to the point.

"Nothing is wrong with me," she asserted, half imploringly, half-defiantly. "You make a mistake in thinking there is."

"But your tears?"

"Tears do not always indicate trouble."

"What else do they indicate?"

"It might be one of several things. As for myself, there is nothing the matter. You will please not refer to the matter again."

Again her manner was a mixture of appeal and defiance, but there was that in it which told those who knew her well that it would be useless to press the inquiry. Harold looked at Mr. Stowell helplessly, but the elder man came into the discussion in the most inappropriate way imaginable.

"Never mind, young people," he advised; "this will all be right. Remember that you are to be married to-night."

Viola started up quickly.

"Never!" she cried. "I refuse to listen to it!"

The two men stood in speechless amazement. Not so Flipper Flynn. He was not in the least surprised; the announcement was just what he had been looking for.

"She's dropped on Mister Harold in some way," was his mental decision; "an' that festive gent is in the drink, the worst way. Will she tell why?"

"You won't listen?" gasped Stowell, when he could command his voice enough to speak.

"I refuse to be married," Viola distinctly explained.

"What does this mean?" cried Harold.

"I have no statement to make. Call it a woman's whim, if you will; it makes no difference. Now, one thing more: I wish to be left alone. I want every one to go away from me!"

She suddenly turned her gaze upon the Patrol, seeming to see for the first time that a stranger was present.

"Who is this boy?" she added, complainingly.

Flipper Flynn would not have been himself if he had proved unequal to the occasion. He plucked off his old cap, and confidentially replied:

"It's all right, mum; I'm one o' the white hen's chickens. I'm a sort of necessary evil in the community, but not the worst or crookedest. I am on the square, an' no assassin or man-killer. Yes; an' I kin keep a secret, too!"

He winked at her sagely, but the hint was thrown away.

"Why did you admit a stranger here, father?"

Mr. Stowell pulled at his beard and was uncertain. For the first time he realized that family secrets had been spread in a promiscuous way, and he wondered vaguely how it happened Flipper had been taken into the conference, anyhow. Harold's whole thought was of Viola's apparent rebellion; he struck to that point tenaciously.

"I could not meet you at the depot," he urged, "and I could not get here sooner. I was sent out of town by my employer, and an accident to the train made me an exile, there. I did my best, but I could not overturn the decrees of Nature. I am sorry you are hurt about it—"

"Have I said I was?"

"No; but what else can it be? It must be the cause of your opposition to me—"

"It is not!"

"Not the cause? What, then, in the name of all that's wonderful, is the cause?"

"I have no explanation to make."

Viola, to speak lightly, "held the fort." The men looked dumbly at her. Stowell was amazed, and if Harold did not share the feeling, he gave a good imitation. When it was seen that she was going to say no more, the gentleman bethought himself of Flipper Flynn, again.

He took the Patrol by the sleeve and led him out, and a wink to Dunning caused the latter to follow after. Viola was left in possession of the field. Once in the hall, Stowell put on a mysterious look.

"What does it all mean?" he demanded, in a loud whisper.

"I don't know," Harold returned; "but, surely you must have some clew to the matter."

"I haven't any. The girl came down here to marry you, and now she utterly repudiates the contract. It is astounding to me. Have you no theory to offer?"

"I can only infer that she is vexed because I have been so late."

"That is not it. She has from the first insisted that you had some good reason for your absence; and she is not one to evade the point by falsehood or subterfuge."

"True."

"Then what are we to think?"

The two men grappled with the conundrum in earnest, while Flipper Flynn smiled knowingly.

"Gents," he thought, "the trouble is that you give Viola a room too near the ranch of Mr. Gilbert Dunning!"

He was not disposed to intrude his views upon any one. He had not been asked for them; and he was not sure he would get out of the case well if he related what he did know. What reasonable excuse could he give for his invasion of Gilbert's room? If, as he suspected, Harold was in league with his brother in ways that were dark, it would be possible for him to order the arrest of the Patrol and have him sent to jail as a burglar. This would utterly destroy the value of his testimony, if it did not give him a term in the State's service. The Patrol was duly discreet.

Conversation lullied between the men, and Harold turned to Flipper.

"About this boy," he suggested; "I have not yet heard who he is."

"He's a friend of your brother."

"Oh!"

Harold did not look very much pleased with this information.

"Where is Gilbert?" he added.

The question was addressed to Flipper, and he did not prove unequal to the occasion. Calmly and seriously he replied:

"I have an idee he may hev gone out fer a shave, but I ain't noways certain."

"Has he been here lately?"

"I've only jest struck the burgh, myself, an' can't say. He wa'n't here when I showed up. You ought ter know where he is, mister."

It was a quiet suggestion to Harold, but it produced no visible uneasiness. Dunning answered:

"I do not. Do you know my brother well?"

"About tolerable, I may say."

"Oh! he's a friend of his," put in Stowell, jumping at the conclusion recklessly.

Harold evidently had some idea in his head, but what it was he did not explain. He and the old gentleman were all bound up in other matters. Still further they discussed the mystery which threatened to break up a wedding. In the mean while, Flipper was doing some thinking.

"Mebbe yer brother has got back, now, an' is in his room, mister," was his suggestion, after he had meditated somewhat.

Stowell caught at the idea.

"We'll look at once," he decided.

He opened the door and all walked in, but Gilbert was not there. The time had come, however, for the Patrol to spring his bomb.

"Wot's that on the bed?" he asked, innocently.

"Why," Stowell returned, "it's almost like blood!"

"Blood it is, gents," the boy averred; "an' fresh. Say, who shed it?"

CHAPTER VI.

FLIPPER TAKES THE TRAIL.

BEFORE making the last announcement Flipper Flynn had gone through the form of examining the red stain on the bed, and he made his report without undue show of feeling. He watched sharply, however, to see what effect it would have upon Harold.

Unfortunately, Stowell was not prepared for the tragic as the Patrol had been when he came in, and the old gentleman did nothing to help along the plot.

He did not know what meaning the red stain might, or might not have, naturally. As for Harold, he ignored the thing entirely. Assuming a thoughtful expression, real or feigned, he stood like one wholly absent in mind.

"Mister," persisted Flipper, "wot d'ye think of it?"

"I know not," impatiently answered Harold; "and I don't know as I care. I am going to leave you, Mr. Stowell. I will see you at the earliest possible moment; but I have business, now. I hope you and Viola will come to an understanding, and have all fixed when I return."

Viola's father hoped so, too; and he said as much. He was in a mood for a long talk about the mystery, but he was not humored. Harold had something else on hand, and he got out of the house as soon as possible, though with due ceremony and deference to his aged companion.

A word to Flipper had caused that young man to follow; and Harold turned upon him quickly.

"Boy, will you do an errand for me?"

"Reckon I kin, boss."

"I want to make arrangements for my friends to go to a better place than this; and I want to get word to my brother, so he can help me out. All of this I cannot do at once, of course. Now, I would like to hire you to take word to Gilbert. Will you act for me?"

"I s'pose I might."

"Do it, and I will give you a dollar for your trouble. All I want is for you to notify him that I want to see him as soon as possible."

"That's simple."

"Here is your money, and here is a card with my address. Give it to him, and tell him to come to me at once."

"I'm yer man."

Harold handed over the articles named, and then hastened away without waiting to see what the Patrol was going to do about it. If he had remained, he would have seen Flipper stand perfectly still.

"Old chap," he soliloquized, "you want ter take a long breath at this point. You want ter see where you are. You've been driftin' with the tide, an' it would puzzle a Feladelpy law-

yer ter know where you stand. You are working fer some several men, an' you've claimed acquaintance with more. Where will you come up, ef you go the gait much longer?"

He considered the matter seriously. If he had possessed less nerve he would have ended it all by getting out of the whole affair while he could, but this was not his way. He had become interested, and was eager to see the sequel.

After some thought, he re-entered the hotel and made further search for Roger Hethington; but the latter was not visible, nor could he find any one who had seen him. The Englishman had gone out of sight as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed him up, and when Flipper remembered the red stain in Gilbert Dunning's room, he shook his head doubtfully.

"I don't see how the work could hev been done successfully right in broad daylight, but there's the red stain, and there's the panic Viola is in. All these things must mean something. I don't like ter malign nobody, but it looks bad!"

It was not easy to decide on a plan of action, but the Patrol was not yet prepared to make charges against any one. He was well aware that the word of one as young as he was not always accepted by older persons readily; it was prudent for him to go slow.

"I'll see Gilbert afore I get a move on. He is a feller who ain't ter be sneezed at, ef I size him up correct. Here goes fer his nibsey! I hope the word ain't got ter him that I know him, fer it would kinder s'prise him; an' it might result in his settin' down on me, hard!"

He looked at the given address again, and then set out. The distance was not a long one, and he was nearing the point when he had an encounter. A small girl blocked his way.

"Say," she exclaimed, "do you know where the police station is?"

The Patrol paused and looked at her critically.

"Want ter be arrested?" he inquired.

"Me? Dear me! no; it would just scare me ter death!" she declared.

"You know how it feels, do ye? So do I! A grim and ghastly thing is the police shop. He who enters there leaves hope behind."

Flipper did not intend to do any harm, or to discourage the inquirer, but he was in a very doubtful mood, himself, and inclined to look upon the future as something not especially bright for him. The small girl, not being in this secret, was more than ever alarmed by his serio-comic air, which seemed to be wholly serious. She stood in silence until he went on:

"Police is a necessary evil. We approve on 'em until they kinder set down on us, an' then we don't. See? When the innocent, like me, is dragged off ter spend the balance o' their nat'ral days in hock, it becomes sorter serious, by gum!"

"I don't know what I am ter do."

"W'ot do yer want ter do?"

"I'll tell you," was the confidential reply. "My name is Betty Gray, an' I live at Mrs. Jacobs's. Now, there is a young man there they are keeping a prisoner. He's in danger, fer they hev got some awful plot in view, an' I've got ter help him out; but I don't know how ter do it. It's a big job."

"Got him pris'ner, hev they?"

"We think so."

"Ef it's only a case o' *think*, why don't he put on his patent-leathers an' walk out, hisself?"

"He's sick, an' can't walk."

"That's a cat of a different color. He ought ter hev me fer an aid."

This was another grim joke on Flipper's part, for he believed he was already loaded down with difficulties; but Betty caught at the idea.

"Won't you do it?" she cried, eagerly.

"Miss, I advise you ter go ter the police."

"But I'm afraid o' them; I don't know w'ot they would do ter me. I always was afraid o' them, an' you tell me there is good reason fer it. I wouldn't go ter them fer the world! I want you to help me. You are just the one ter do it."

The Patrol saw he had got into trouble with his joke, and he set out to undo the mischief; but found he had undertaken a large contract. Betty had only gained courage enough to go to the police by desperate efforts, and Flipper had swept all that courage away. He failed to restore it with all his eloquence. Somehow, the girl was attracted to him strongly; it became a fixed idea with her that he must take part in the venture.

As she described the situation more fully he gained an interest, himself, and the fact that it was supposed the job was a short one had due effect.

"If Isaac Moss kin hev some one as strong as

you ter give him an arm, he kin walk out," persisted Betty; "he said so, hisself."

"My friend, I reckon you can count me in, though ef this wa'n't sech a short job I couldn't do it, nobow. I s'pose I hev more biz on hand than the Mayor of Weehawken, already. Still, ef we kin run off the present ribbon in quick order, why, here goes. Lead on, my charmer!"

Betty was ready enough; she started, and Flipper was obliged to make his legs play nimbly to keep with her. Several blocks were traversed, and then they arrived at the house of adventure.

Mrs. Kate Jacobs was noted for her vigilance, especially in things where money was at stake, but Betty had arranged to beat her out. Once at the scene, the girl whisked Flipper in through the house of a neighbor; then to the back-yards, and then into the Jacobs residence by the back door.

This bit of strategy was helped on by good luck, and she conducted the Patrol to Isaac Moss's room, without meeting any one on the way. They were soon in Isaac's presence, whereupon Betty burst forth explosively:

"Here's the one to rescue ye, sir!"

"Ah! So you've made a raise?"

"Yes, sir."

"A keen-looking lad. My boy, are you prepared to lift a lame dog over the fence?"

"Not ter-day; it ain't in my line. What I be here fer is ter get you out o' hock, ef you need it; an' the sooner we git a wiggle on, the better it will be fer us."

"You never spoke truer, and we will lose no time. Explanations can come later. Here, my good friepd, give me your arm, and we will get out of here as soon as possible."

The direct way in which Isaac came to the point was the best evidence that he realized the gravity of the occasion. The levity he had been in the habit of using with Betty no longer marked his manner. He looked anxiously toward the door as he gave the last direction.

Flipper did not keep him waiting. He gave his arm, as requested, and Isaac put forth his strength. He did not come out of the chair, and a sudden change came over his face.

"Can't ye make it?" asked the Patrol.

"I'm afraid I can't," Isaac confessed, almost in a whisper.

"Ain't yer legs no good?"

"They are like rags. They have all along refused to support me, but I was foolish enough to believe the help of a strong arm would suffice to make them of the necessary muscle. It is useless; I could not stand with a dozen men to assist me."

"W'ot's ter be done, then?"

"What, indeed?"

"I can't carry you, fer I ain't got the muskle of Samson. Mister, you've got ter call in more beef. As I understand this matter, you expect Mother Jacobs an' her gang ter swallow you, socks an' all, ef you don't slip away, immejit. Wal, you've got ter call in the police!"

"No, no!" Isaac exclaimed.

"Why not?"

"That I don't know, but, in my horrible condition, with my past utterly lost to memory, I have an unexplainable, yet strong, feeling that, of all taings, I want to keep out of sight of the police."

The Patrol regarded Isaac with doubt which was not unmingled with suspicion. He had allowed Betty to prevail over his good nature, and had come on an errand not to his liking; but why an honest man, in his right mind or out of it, should object to being saved by the police he could not understand.

"You can get somebody else, can't you?" asked Betty, anxiously, putting her hand coaxingly on the Patrol's arm.

"Don't think I kin," he returned. "When I do a job I like ter hev some light on the matter."

"Great heavens!" Isaac exclaimed; "If you object to being in the dark, what do you think of me?"

CHAPTER VII.

LOST TO SIGHT.

THE appeal was not lost on Flipper Flynn.

"That's a fact," he agreed. "With your past all locked up you do need light, an' you are in a bad way, I will admit. Cheer up!—I'll stand by ye, my friend. Yes; I'll go fer a helper. We'll get a whole regiment, ef necessary."

"One man will be enough," hastily returned Isaac.

"All right; it shall be jest as you say. Now, don't let us lose any more time. I'll be off like a wild hoss of the plains. Observe me gallop! Jest you hold the fort a few minutes longer,

an' you shall see me with a posse of one. So-long!"

Flipper tried to be as cheerful as possible, and he shook Isaac's hand cordially and began the effort to get back to the street without being seen by the people of the house.

In this he was successful, and he felt relieved when he again trod the pavements. Yet, he knew the danger was not over for Isaac. He looked anxiously at a neighboring clock.

"No time ter lose, old chap! Ef they are in a hurry ter get the feller moved they may beat you out, ef you don't get a wiggle on. Who shall I get fer a helper? Why, Michael Moran, ter be sure. Off I go!"

The Patrol was ignoring Isaac's wishes in one respect when he thus decided. Moran was a detective, but it was in the private line, and he well knew he was to be trusted.

No very long journey lay before him, and he was soon in Moran's presence. It need scarcely be said that the telling of the story was a short matter with the nimble-tongued Patrol. As for the detective, he listened with a smile.

"What will you be into, next?" he banteringly asked. "You are always having some such adventure under way."

"One such, did you say?"

"How?"

"You speak in the singular number, pard. One? Great howlin' hyenas! That ain't any name fer it. I hev got enough under way at this blessed minute ter sink a ship! I am out on sev'ral errands, now, all at once. I hev left one ter do another, an' I presoom I shall leave this in the same style. Biz? Why, it is fairly hummin'! But that ain't the point: Will you go along with me an' rescue the Isaac chap?"

"I shall not lose the chance to get onto a case."

"You don't want ter let Isaac know you're a detective, or he will give you the giant fire."

"Trust me for that."

They went out, and Flipper more fully unfolded his plan. Some scheme had to be devised for taking Moss away, and the simplest of all seemed to be to add a cabman to the party. This was done. Then they made haste to get to the Jacobs house.

The Patrol and Moran agreed that the proper course was to get Moss out unseen, if possible; so they returned to the interior by the same way in which Flipper had retreated—the back yard.

"Strikes me it's very silent here," Moran remarked.

"I wuz jest thinkin' o' that."

"All the better, if it's the right kind of silence; but it may be the enemy has dropped on your scheme, and is in wait for us. Keep a weather eye open, Flip!"

"I've got two on 'em propped open."

A feeling of uneasiness entered the speaker's mind when he saw that Betty was not at hand to receive them, but it would not do to wait for her. They crept through the hall and up the stairs. No one appeared to challenge them.

Isaac's room was at hand. They went to the door, yet the feeling would not down that all this good luck might prove to be anything but that. Flipper opened the door.

The room lay revealed to their gaze—and it was all they saw.

Isaac was not there!

Moran turned a questioning gaze upon Flipper, and saw him with a blank and dismayed face.

"Patrol, what does this mean?"

"Pard, we're too late!"

"Do you think—?"

"Isaac hes been took away! There ain't no other way ter account fer it. No wonder Betty wa'n't here ter receive us. Mister, this gives me a shock; the enemy hes got the bulge on us, as sure as guns!"

"Your friends may be in hiding."

"But Isaac can't walk a step. No, sirree; we can't rely on no sech good luck as that. We are jest one lap too late."

"Did you learn where this other place was that they intended to take their prey to?"

"No. Nobody knew but them. Isaac didn't; Betty didn't. It is dead sure we don't."

"Let us not remain here idle. Improbable as it appears, they may yet be in the house. We'll throw secrecy to the dogs; if we can get a grip on the gang, they shall give up Moss or get a deal they won't relish. Come on!"

He led the way, and the Patrol did not seek to check him. Unceremoniously they opened the door nearest them. It revealed only a vacant room. The attempt was begun, and they prosecuted it zealously. That floor was soon searched; then they went below and, while Flipper stood guard, Moran went on with the work rapidly, now seeking only for Mrs. Jacobs and her

friends; and prepared to initiate war if he discovered them.

But the history of the beginning was the history of the end; not a person could he unearth anywhere.

"Done up!" the Patrol commented, as Moran reappeared.

"We are baffled, surely."

"D'ye s'pose they got onto my visit?"

"It matters not, since they are gone."

"Yes; an' Isaac is gone with them. Likewise, Betty; a trim little maiden I got a good bit interested in. Say, sport, it goes awfully ag'in' the grain fer ter be done up in this way. It ain't my style ter lose all my eggs out o' the basket; an' this time they are plum' gone, an' the basket with 'em. Tough luck, by gum!"

To ease his feelings, the speaker kicked over one chair, and then sat down in another in a melancholy frame of mind.

"What are you going to do now?" asked Moran.

"What kin I do?"

"Will you give it up?"

"Will I? Say, general, I guess you don't know the huckleberry you are addressing of, do ye? Give up? Not for Jeremiah! I hev took an interest in this case that I don't generally take in anything; I hev. Result, I'm goin' ter see it through or bu'st in the seein'. Them's my sentiments, Michael."

"I am rejoiced to find you so plucky. This is, I do believe, a case in which all honest persons should feel an interest; and as upholders of the law, we clearly have a sacred duty to perform."

"Dunno about that; but we're goin' ter knock the stuffin' out o' them measly critters!" Flipper declared.

"Put it as you will."

"Ef I kin, I'll put it with a thump that'll make 'em see stars."

"Well, this house is unoccupied. Whatever we do must be done with outsiders. Can you suggest anything?"

"No."

"Then we'll try interviewing the neighbors."

They went out, but the plan did not work to a charm. No one had seen the Jacobs party leave, or if they had, they did not see fit to say so. When interrogated as to the character of Mrs. Kate and her associates, they professed equal ignorance.

There was a chance that this was not the most reliable of information, but they had to let it go at that. When inquiry of cabmen in the vicinity had been made without avail, both Flipper and Moran were ready to give up for the time being.

"I'm going to keep at it, though," added the detective. "Will you meet me to-morrow?"

"I'll try ter."

"Do so. You will, I am sure, find this a case of rare interest. We read about men who lose their identity like Isaac Moss, but such cases are rare. I never saw one, before. Naturally, this novelty is very interesting—"

"Yes; ter all but Isaac!"

"The point is well made; Poor fellow! he has my sincere sympathy. Well, good-night! Come to my office to-morrow; I will be there, or will leave word so you can find me."

He hastened away with the air of a man who is bound for bed and glad of the fact. Flipper Flynn thrust his hands deep into his pockets and muttered:

"So-long, my friend, an' may yer dreams be happy ones. Ez fer me, I don't expect ter dream right away, though I may hev the worst kind of a nightmare. I ain't forgot I am due at Gilbert Dunning's boudware, an' ef I cast my shadder on the wall I want ter be about it, by gum! It ain't so early as it was."

He looked again at the address; then hastened away.

"I'm goin' ter get the cobwebs out o' my eyes right away," he pursued. "I've got too much biz fer one small youth, an' ef it wa'n't fer keepin' my word, I should never deliver this letter o' mouth. As 'tis, I'll git it off the hooks on the rush."

He was reckless to go near Gilbert, and he knew it, but, arriving at the place, he boldly rung the bell. He was informed that the person was in, and was soon in his presence.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HEAD VILLAIN.

FLIPPER FLYNN knew Gilbert at first sight. He had heard him described, and his face was not one to be in doubt about. The red hair and florid face furnished their own identification, as

it were. Gilbert was not in the least like Harold Dunning, in appearance, but he was very much like himself, as the Patrol aptly expressed it.

"You wished to see me?" Gilbert inquired.

"That wuz the object of my supernat'ral appearance," Flipper gravely returned. "You see—"

Before he could explain more the door suddenly opened and a man entered unannounced. The Patrol drew a quick breath. Matters were assuming an aspect far from pleasant to him.

The new-comer was Harold Dunning!

"Hello!" saluted Gilbert, carelessly.

"So your friend is still with you?" returned the brother, stopping short.

"My friend?"

"This young man," and he pointed to Flipper Flynn.

"Oul he's only a chance visitor, who dropped in just now. I never saw him until a second ago."

Harold looked surprised, and the Patrol concluded it was time for him to come into the talk.

"This gent is right," he admitted. "You see, there was a mistake at the other ranch. The gent from the clover-fields of the Adirondacks was doin' all the talkin', an' he did it so well I had ter let him wiggle; no chance for a modest youth ter get a word in edgeways. He jumped ter the conclusion I was a friend of Mr. Dunning, an' I let the guess run. It didn't matter much, anyhow."

"No."

Harold seemed to believe what he said, but Gilbert gazed at the glib speaker sharply.

"What's all this about?" he asked, suspiciously.

"Nothing," the other brother returned, impatiently. "It is a mere trifle. Have you duly delivered my message, boy?"

"Not yet, fer I was delayed on the way by an accident I couldn't git away with. I'll do it now, though, mister: yer brother would like fer ter see you at yer earliest convenience!"

"A great fellow you are ter run an errand!" retorted Harold. "Get out of here, now; we have no use for an unfaithful servant. You can go."

"Wait!" ordered Gilbert. "I may want something to say in this case. Sit down, boy; you and I will have a talk, later on."

"All right, general."

In every way the florid-faced man betrayed the fact that he was full of suspicion, but Flipper was not to be frightened. He had confidence in himself and his ability to get out of trouble, and it was an excellent chance to study Gilbert, while he was in the same business himself. Hence, he was perfectly calm, and when he was directed to go into the next room, he went nonchalantly.

Unfortunately, one of his plans came to grief at the start; when he set out to act the listener, he found he could hear nothing. Evidently, the master of the place was as shrewd as he was suspicious; he compelled Harold to talk in tones so low that nothing was audible in the other room. Now, the Patrol was not wholly certain he had done wisely to put himself so fully in Gilbert's power, but he did not even look to see if there was a way of escape.

"I'm in fer it," he soliloquized, "an' I'm bound ter see the whole figger danced. I've got Mister Gilbert sized up, already; he's a fly gent of the first water. Can't say positively whether he's a crook, but his mug would get him admission to the Tombs on suspicion. Wonder w'ot he would say ef I come out boldly an' asked him where Roger Hethington is? Mebbe, old chap, you'd better not do it, though."

Before the delay had grown unpleasant, the door opened and Gilbert appeared to view. He paused on the threshold and looked attentively at the Patrol.

The pause grew burdensome before it was broken.

"Say," observed the Flipper, at length, "it won't cost you a red ter say something!"

"Boy," Gilbert returned, "who are you?"

"I'm my father's son!"

"Granted! What else?"

"Nothin'."

"Have you no explanation to make?"

"Dunno ez I hev."

"You know me?"

"Do I?"

"Surely; and if you are my friend, you will speak out."

Flipper Flynn was nonplused. He had the nerve to take advantage of this natural mistake on Gilbert's part, but he did not know how to do it properly. Headlong assurance might simply make him ridiculous, and he could have

no other stock in trade. He was tempted to fall back on denials, but thought better of it and, suddenly looking up, made answer:

"Well, boss, I am square when I say I ain't enter yer biz, much. I know you get a livin' the best way you kin,"—he watched sharply to see the result of his venture—"an' that is about all I do know. Can't claim yer acquaintance, nor that of any of yer bosom friends; but, I do know some gents who are as fly as they make 'em. That's all I hev ter say."

Plainly, Gilbert was favorably impressed by this statement.

"All right; but I really thought you had come here on some secret errand. I didn't want m' brother to get onto it."

"Ain't he safe?"

"He don't know of all my work."

"The Englishman, fer instance?"

Gilbert looked puzzled.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh! ef you don't know, I guess I won't tell you. Never mind, Gil; you an' I understand each other."

The master of the place did not agree to this statement, nor did he deny it. He answered evasively, and a general conversation followed. It was one in which the Patrol had a deep interest. He wished to so win his companion's confidence that he would throw caution away and let the boy into his secrets, in a measure. To this end Flipper worked, but when the interview was over, he could not see that he had made any visible advance. The host had been sociable; he had been willing to talk on almost any subject; but had skillfully avoided saying what could be used against him in the future, directly or indirectly.

He finally yawned and observed:

"It is bed-time, and I shall have to turn you out. However, I'll call on you, some time, if you'll give me your address."

"Will you?" thought the Patrol. "I'd be a clam ter put you in that way until I found out jest how you stand. You kin hev an address, but while it will be one where I shall hear ef you call, you can't find me there ter drop on!"

Aloud, he answered in an innocent way, and then prepared to go. Gilbert had relighted a half-smoked cigar, using a piece of paper and the gas-light near him. He then made a cast to throw the remnant of the paper into the fire, but only succeeded in throwing it on the floor.

Flipper could afford to be obligin', so he stooped to get the burning fragment and save his companion labor.

He had the paper over the fire when he chanced to catch sight of a name on its surface.

"Isaac Moss!"

It might mean nothing, but the thing did not reach the fire. The Patrol's back furnished a shield to his operations, and he quickly and neatly thrust the paper into his pocket.

Gilbert had seen nothing, and he puffed the cigar in a contented way as his visitor went out.

"I'll see you again," he promised, once more.

"All right, mister; you shall!"

The promise had a deeper meaning than Gilbert suspected, but he was not enlightened further then. Flipper lost no more time on the way, and was soon on the street. He chuckled as his feet pressed the sidewalk, and winked as if he had happened on a good joke.

"You're pretty fly, Gil!" he admitted, "yet you wa'n't in it, that time. I've fooled you a good bit—unless you've fooled me wuss than I know on. We'll see."

He paused near a street-lamp to look at the paper thus peculiarly acquired. Words were written, there, and he proceeded to decipher them. The fire had consumed the upper part of the page, and but little was left. He read the remnant:

"Isaac Moss is not likely ever to be any better, but you will make no mistake by being careful, Mr. Dunning. Caution is the silent partner of success. Come and see him when we get him moved. You need have no fear of being recognized; he would not know his own mother. G. D. would not awaken a thought in his darkened mind. Come, by all means, and see your man. See how his past has been swept away; see how little fear you have of ever meeting him as a rival. He is—"

This was the end.

Flipper whistled softly.

"Well, by gum!" he exclaimed, "that's nice. So Gil is in that game, too? Well, he's a corker!"

There could be no doubt that it was Gilbert to whom the letter was addressed; the initials "G. D." served to prove an *alibi* for Harold. Flipper was surprised to see his two cases run together, but while he was considering the point, he was startled by the laying of a hand on his shoulder.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT OLD SPICER WANTED.

THE Patrol wheeled quickly. Before him stood a man whose personal appearance certainly did not furnish a recommendation for him. He looked as if he were a remnant of some more attractive article, and had just crawled out of bed, at that.

"Hullo, young feller!" he remarked rather than exclaimed.

"Hullo, *old* feller!" was the Patrol's easy response, as he surveyed his companion doubtfully.

"Out fer the air?"

"Naw; I'm out fer myself."

"Of course you be, but I guess you know wot I mean. Say, ain't you Flipper Flynn?"

"That's my handle, general."

"I thought so. Well, I was lookin' fer you. I was sent out fer that very puppus. Somebody wants fer ter see ye, Master Flynn."

"Who?"

"A feller named Isaac Moss has sent fer you; sent me ter find ye. I wuz on the way when I happened on you. Ye see, I've seen ye before. Why, sure; you an' me has cantered around Houston street soil fer many a day, ain't we? Well, I guess!"

The seedy man poked Flipper playfully in the ribs, and laughed in a way not pleasing to the person whose acquaintance was thus freely claimed. Flipper regarded his new acquaintance suspiciously.

"General, I don't know you," he admitted.

"I'm Old Spicer."

"Wot d'ye spice?—Tom an' Jerry, an' sech beverages?"

"Ha! ha! you're a funny feller! But say, Isaac wants ter see you, bad; he does."

Flipper regarded Mr. Spicer doubtfully. He was not one to awaken a feeling of confidence or admiration. He was like the last run of Poverty and demoralization; and the message he bore did not recommend him to the Patrol. Instead, that wary adventurer was at once suspicious of a trap. The encounter smacked of more than chance.

"Yes," replied the boy, with dignity; "I am a funny feller. I wuz built that way by chance, an' they saw I was sp'it fer any other purpose, so they let me stand. But that ain't ter the point; wot do you mean to say is the reason you are here?"

"Isaac sent me."

"Who's he?"

"Isaac Moss, you know."

"Um! An' where is he?"

"Over on South Fifth avenue. I don't know the number o' the house, but I kin find it, you bet."

This was not getting light very fast, but Flipper persevered; he subjected Old Spicer to a catechism, and arrived at this explanation: The seedy gentleman was a rounder about South Fifth avenue and vicinity. He had, he claimed, been called into a house by a small girl, and given an interview with a man who announced his name as Isaac Moss. This man had employed him to take a message to Flipper Flynn, stating that he was in trouble and wanted immediate help.

"He said," added Old Spicer, "that ef you would come, you an' me could take him out ez wale ez a dozen men; so ef you want ter, we will amble along."

"All right, my friend; amble as soon ez you please."

The ready answer pleased Mr. Spicer, as the Patrol plainly saw, but he did not, himself, hesitate in the least.

Nevertheless, Flipper had no intention of going far in Spicer's lead. He regarded the fellow as a very poor kind of a decoy. Rascal was branded on him indelibly by Nature, and whisky had added to the marking.

Seeing the gleam of his evil little eyes, one would be very foolish, indeed, to go into danger with him as a guide. Flipper simply intended to see the outside of the house he claimed sheltered Isaac, and then get away at full speed.

Events proved that the enemy had foreseen just this caution, and had a more timely plot on the programme.

As they were passing the corner of a street, two other persons turned around from the opposite way, coming so suddenly that the Patrol found himself facing them before he could fairly make out what he had to meet. He did see one thing, however, which was not in need of explanation.

A hand was reached out to grasp him, and only his habit of vigilance and his agility saved him. Quickly lowering his head, he dodged under the man's arm before he really had time to think what he was doing. The prompt action,

though, took him past the man, and as he turned he had a most interesting view.

Both of the strangers were looking at him as if they had him already, and Old Spicer was joining them in the regard. In an instant it flashed upon the Patrol that his danger had been in the street, not in any house; and it was clear he had made the escape by a hair's-breadth.

"The young hound has escaped!" cried one of the gang.

"After him!"

But Flipper saw Old Spicer's lips move, and, though he was too wily to look at his allies as he spoke, the result was soon perceptible. The other men seized upon him, and Spicer made a great feint at struggling.

"Help! Flip; help!" he implored. "Come ter my aid!"

A mocking laugh escaped the boy's lips.

"Say," he returned, "what fer a greener do you take me ter be? See any hayseed in my hair?"

"Will you desert a comrade?" persisted Spicer.

"Ef you want help, apply ter your chums who are holdin' of ye up! Tom-an'-Jerry, I hate ter say it, but we must part; the trick is too thin. I'm on! So-long!"

He waved his hand and turned away. It then became clear to the gang that the game was, indeed, up, and they took steps accordingly. As one man they rushed in pursuit of the Patrol. He uttered another derisive laugh.

"I'll see you later, gents. Ef any o' you want ter apply fer a chance ez sprinters, now's the time. Whoop!—get a wiggle on, an' show yer blood!"

It was not a generous thing for him to say and do. From the first he had a walk-over. The enemy floundered along in the rear in the painfully laborious style of heavyweights. They slipped and panted; and they would have yelled their vain rage had they not had occasion to fear the results. Policemen have a habit of investigating such things, and for the police this aggregation of men had a deep, if not a holy horror.

Flipper Flynn soon left them behind. Then he took matters more easily.

"Old chap, you had a close call, then!" he remarked, confidentially. "Wily scheme, they had there; I never thought of hev'in' any rum-puss by the way. The way I sized it up was that they wanted ter decoy me in som'er's, an' then set down on my anatomy. Well, old chap, you're out of it, an' I see that you're all hunk. Now, how do we stand?"

He paused by a street-lamp to again look at the half-burned note secured from Gilbert's room.

He read it through meditatively.

"Isaac Moss has lost his name an' other things. Wal, b'jinks! I allow I hev found 'em fer him. Who should he be but Lionel Hethington, brother ter my other new friend, Roger Hethington? Ef this ain't the right deal, it is a most amazin' coincidence."

The evidence did, indeed, seem strong, and his belief did not waver as he made his way homeward.

"I'll see Detective Michael Moran the first thing in the mornin'," he muttered, as he turned over on his bed. "Him an' I will!"

His voice ceased, and he was asleep.

The next morning he found that his hard work had left him somewhat weary and sore, but his zeal never had been greater. He swallowed his breakfast hurriedly, and then made a line for Moran's. There disappointment awaited him; Moran was out, and his whereabouts and probable time of return could not be told by any one at the place.

He next went over to Erastus Stowell's hotel, but found the place was his stopping-point no longer. Harold Dunning had taken the old gentleman and his daughter away at an early hour, the inquirer was told. The Patrol did not inquire for Gilbert, but a chance remark made known the additional fact that the brother had not been around since the previous night.

This disposed of one more chance, and Flipper went out feeling at a loss how to take up the trail again.

He walked on for some time in a meditative mood, but was suddenly aroused.

"Cricketty-jim!" he exclaimed; "there's Betty Gray!"

He crossed the street quickly, and accosted the girl. She had been walking in a way which seemed aimless.

"Hullo, Sunshine!" was his eager greeting.

"How goes it?"

She looked up, and her face grew bright.

"Oul! I'm soglad ter see you!" she declared.

"Be you? Wal, now, that's encouragin'. Kinder coincidental, too, fer I feel jest that way myself. Say, how'd you drop here?"

"They've cast me off!"

"Who hev'?"

"Mother Jacobs, an' the rest."

"You don't say so! An' where in the dickens be they? Yes; an' where is our friend, Isaac?"

"I don't know. They moved last night. I tried ter keep track on 'em, an' seem innocent: an' not ter let on that I was out o' likin' with 'em, but it didn't go. You see, they went all of a sudden, when they did go. The carriage come ter the door; they bundled us in on the run, an' off we went. Isaac never said a word, but he gave me a secret look an' shook his head, as ef ter caution me not ter be rash. Of course I was jest ez mum as be."

"But where did the carriage take ye?"

"That's wot worries me; I don't know. We drove a long ways, an' then pulled up at a house in a street I never had seen before. I stood there lookin' around, but Mother Jacobs grabbed me an' told me ter get a move on. Then I was hustled back inter the carriage, an' told I was ter go an' get some things. I wanted ter find out wot I was ter get, but before I could ask, away went the carriage. We traveled a long ways, an' then the driver, he stops, gets out, an' says ter me: 'We stop here!'"

"Where was you?"

"Over on Greenwich avenue."

"D'ye know anybody there?"

"Not a soul. You wait an' hear me. I hadn't no sooner got on the sidewalk than he whipped up his hosses, an' away he went. I didn't see him no more."

"Dead shock!" Flipper agreed. "Wot did ye do then?"

"I couldn't do but one thing; I went back ter the old quarters. When I got there I couldn't git in, but one o' the neighbors took me inter her house."

"Dead shock!" repeated the Patrol, gloomily.

"This mornin' I started out ter find Mother Jacobs's new place, but I can't do it."

"Never mind; you don't want ter find it. It might be dangerous!"

CHAPTER X.

THE ACCUSATION.

FLIPPER FLYNN made the statement seriously, but Betty quickly exclaimed:

"I'll stand by Isaac, anyhow!"

"I know; that's your way. A good one, you be, Sunshine, but ye don't want ter run no risk of taking one o' Isaac's best friends away from him fer all time. Now, ez I look at this matter, you hev been shook off by the enemy. Well, I think they've done a foolish thing. By shakin' you they hev made you an out-an'-out enemy, which is su'thin' they can't afford ter do."

"Mebbe they was on ter me."

"That's a fact."

"I don't know wot ter do, now. I want ter find them, fer I think they would take me in, ef only 'cause they're afraid o' me; but where be they?"

"Betty, you be calm. Don't try ter rush this matter. Let me do the fine work, an' I hev an idee we shall come up with a grin, yet. Mike Moran an' yer humble servant will go fer 'em like a colored gent fer water-millions. See?"

Betty was not satisfied with the mere promise, but she had to let it go at that. She looked worn and sleepy after her troubled night, and agreed to go to a safe place and recuperate. Flipper knew just the chance, and he soon had her domiciled with friends of his.

He then went out again.

"I've got rid o' the non-combatants," he mused, "an' now I'll go fer the enemy in a way that'll make 'em howl—ef I kin find the measly critters. We'll see."

His course was again toward Moran's, but he did not reach there. He had traveled but a comparatively short distance when he saw a man whose presence changed the whole course of events.

"Mister Harold Dunning! Now, then, wot's he up ter? These are stirrin' times, an' I can't afford ter let no chance slip. Dun, ol' feller, I'm dead onder you!"

This mysterious announcement did not mean anything more ominous than that the Patrol had planned to act the spy on the gentleman referred to. He fell in like a soldier, and began the pursuit.

Five minutes later Harold reached Washington Square. He paused and looked around closely.

"Expectin' somebody, is he?" muttered the

Patrol. "Wal, Dun, I'll hev a squint at him, too. Oh! so it's a woman! The plot darkens!"

Flipper thought he had the matter down fine, but the result actually dazed him. Harold, after the sharp survey, had gone forward rapidly toward a lady who, clearly, had been waiting. She rose to meet him, and Flipper sidled up, strong in the faith that he was going to discover another lady-love of the gay city gentleman.

Hence, he looked bewildered when he saw her plainly.

It was Viola Stowell!

"Well, b'jinks! here's a queer gal!"

So declared the Patrol, and his belief did not waver as he watched. He was so situated that he could get near enough to overhear the conversation, and this he did not hesitate to do. There was a deal of pantomime to go with the rest. Harold had a very eager air, but when he would have clasped Viola's hand, she drew back and avoided the warm reception.

Then she stood looking at her lover in silence, her face stern and accusing, her manner that of a tragedy queen, as it were.

"Viola!" Harold exclaimed, "what in the name of the wonderful does this mean?"

"Don't you know?" she asked, icily.

"Indeed, I do not."

"I think I can make it plain to you!" she remarked, pointedly. "I have called you here for that purpose; though it seems to me you should have read the truth at the hotel."

"How could I?"

"I refused to marry you, and that, too, after coming all the way from my home for that especial purpose. Did you ever know me to be weak or vacillating? Did you ever know me to be erratic? Did you ever know me to act without just cause?"

"No; and that is just why I am so much at fault. Viola, I have been about mad since last night! I have passed an utterly sleepless night, and by every device have tried to solve the mystery."

"I cannot believe you so ignorant as you pretend, though you may, indeed, be somewhat in the dark."

Flipper Flynn was having not a little interesting occupation in watching these persons. Harold looked what he pretended to be—wholly bewildered and upset; while Viola maintained her air of stern composure—her accusing severity.

"You will have to explain," returned Dunning, helplessly; "I cannot grasp a thing."

"It was a mistake to give me a room so near that of your brother. Does that convey anything to you?"

"Nothing! Surely, Gilbert has not given you cause for annoyance?"

"He has not. You alone are responsible. Since you insist upon the explanation, you shall have it without delay. In brief, you lost all when I took the room which I had. It was, as you are aware, next to your brother's. More than that, the walls were so thin that it was not difficult to overhear conversation from the other side."

She paused as if the secret ought to be his, then, but he maintained his perplexed air. After a pause she went on firmly:

"Last evening I heard some one in the other room for some time, but gave the matter no attention until a second man entered."

"Aha!" murmured Flipper Flynn, with a start.

"Well?" inquired Harold.

"I was not in the business of spying, and, as I said, I gave the matter no especial attention until the voices grew loud and angry—at least, one of them did. It was that of the visitor. He was angry, and he proceeded to heap some accusation upon the former occupants. I could not avoid hearing what followed."

"The visitor charged his companion with playing him false in some matter of business; and this was what I made out:

"They had been in a secret work together, and the visitor had paid the other one money. He had been deceived; he had come for satisfaction. This he had failed to get. He had been roughly received; the satisfaction had been refused. He grew angry at this, and suddenly cried out so distinctly that I could not avoid hearing his words:

"I will force you to treat me fairly! You shall release your grip on my throat, or I'll apply to the police!"

"You dare not!" was the cool reply.

"I dare, and will! You have asked too much of me; I will endure it no longer. Your demands mean ruin to me, if carried out. If I must go to the dogs, I won't go alone!"

"You'll have to catch me, first."

"That is no longer difficult. I know you, at last. Dare you deny that you are Harold Dunning?"

For the first time Harold showed confusion.

"What?" he exclaimed.

"I thought that would touch you. Yes, sir; I heard all. I need not linger upon the words that followed. From words they came to blows, and I knew the visitor was in some way injured—I dare not think, I dare not surmise how!"

For the first time, like her companion, the girl's mood changed. Her head drooped; her voice trembled. She had borne up well, but there was a limit even to such endurance as hers.

"Do you mean," cried Harold, "that the visitor accused the other man of being me?"

"He did so accuse him."

"Surely, it was promptly denied?"

"No; the charge was admitted."

"Admitted?"

"Yes."

"There is some horrible mistake here. I give you my word of honor I was not in the room."

"But I heard your voice!"

"As a party to the talk?"

"The man who was in the room when the visitor came; who held the conversation with him; who admitted he was Harold Dunning; who finally assaulted the visitor and, for all I know, seriously wounded him, was you, Harold Dunning! Do you suppose I could be mistaken in your voice?"

The reply was certainly clear enough to be understood. Harold did understand, but he remained looking at Viola in a dazed way. Innocent or guilty, it was clear the blow fell heavily upon him. At last he found his voice again.

"Viola," he cried, "I declare to you there is some horrible mistake. I solemnly assert that I was not in the room at all. Nay, I swear to it! You saw me as soon as I came to the hotel; I saw you first of all. This is the sacred truth!"

She shook her head.

"I cannot doubt the evidence of my senses," she replied, sadly.

Harold was not ready to give up; he did not give up. He began an earnest argument, using every plea he could bring to his aid. In the mean while Flipper Flynn did some thinking. He was better situated to understand the matter than any one else, and he could grasp what would have been obscure to the uninitiated.

"Dun, ol' chap, yer sins hev found ye out. Yer sweetheart is dead onder ye, an' she ain't yer sweetheart any more times. The little biz has gone back on ye; you must answer fer Roger, livin' or dead!"

CHAPTER XI.

A CLEW GAINED.

FLIPPER FLYNN was not disposed to be uncharitable, but he regarded the case as fully proven. Viola ought not to be mistaken in her lover's voice, and her assertions were only in keeping with what had been presented to the Patrol's own observation.

No doubt, he thought, the Dunning brothers had been equally concerned in the mysterious disappearance of Roger Hethington.

"Dun," the listener soliloquized, "you may as well let Viola go back ter the country, right away. You ain't in it!"

Harold was not inclined to accept this view of the matter so readily, and he continued to press his case until Viola broke into tears. This was not a point gained for him, however; she did not waver in the stand she had taken.

That she had not conquered her love for him was evidenced by the fact that her grief was so deep, yet her resolution was unchangeable.

At times Harold had hesitated, as if he had something on his mind, and he finally requested:

"Let me bring my brother before you as evidence—"

"No!" she answered, firmly; "I have thought of that, and I can plainly see he would do all in his power to clear you. Better let it rest as it is. My own ears have given me evidence that you are a man who lives by his wits; a shameful life; the life of a confidence man, kidnapper, crook—I know not what it is called in slang of this great city, but the results are very clear to me. I see I have narrowly escaped marrying a criminal!"

"I swear to you it is not true! You are in error. I have no cause to blush for any act of mine—"

"Perhaps you have forgotten how to blush," sadly returned Viola. "Let us speak of this

no more. I sent for you to meet me here because I was willing to help hide your secret; because, for the sake of the days that are gone, I would not be the one to drag you to a felon's dock. Even from my father I will keep the secret."

"Yes," agreed the Patrol, "she'll keep it. Keep it? Why, great ginger! you couldn't hire her to go back on him. She's got the nerve ter throw him over, but she likes him jest ez wal ez ever!"

She had made a movement to go, but Harold was not so easily to be shaken off. He continued his pleading, his protestations of innocence, and Viola was not able to terminate the interview.

Finally, he saw he was throwing his time away, and he suddenly threw his head back and exclaimed:

"I will trouble you no more, now; but this you may depend upon: Even if you and I never exchange a word, again, I am going to prove my innocence! I will settle this matter if it takes ten years to do it. I have been unjustly accused; I am going to compel all who doubt my honor to themselves admit it. I have no more to say!"

Flipper Flynn scratched his head.

"Indignant innocence! Is it real, or put on?"

It was a question he could not answer.

Harold did not seek to prolong the interview. He recovered his calmness as quickly as he had lost it, and offered to escort Viola home, but she declined the offer.

They separated and went their ways, whereupon Flipper also moved on. He felt that the case was shrouded in darkness, and did not see how he was to get light without a good deal of luck. Yet, he was nearer the solution than he suspected. His course took him past where he had left Betty Gray, and at that point he was surprised to see that small maiden come sailing out in such haste that her hair flew wildly in the wind.

"Oh! we want ter see you!" she exclaimed.

"I'm yer huckleberry," responded the Patrol, with dignity. "In w'ot way kin I be of value?"

"Abe is here!"

"Abe? Who's he?"

"Why, he's Mother Jacobs's husband."

"Hi! so it's that fortunate gent, is it? Now, that's encouragin'. How did ye get him—with a lasso?"

"He was passin', an' I called him in. He has been cast off, too."

"Mother Jacobs must be hev'in' a general house-cleanin'. But w'ot does it signerfy ter us? Anything promisin'?"

"Abe is clean down on 'em an' he will tell all he can."

"Good fer Abraham! I shall take pleasure in hev'in' a chat with the good soul. Heave ahead, Sunshine!"

They entered the house, and Flipper was soon sitting in Mr. Jacobs's presence. He was not an interesting man, in appearance. He was small of stature, thin of face, and shabby of dress; and his expression was a singular mixture of false humility and natural viciousness.

"Now, Abe," directed Betty, "you tell all you can."

"I kin tell enough," asserted Jacobs, peevishly. "I've been kicked around like a dog all my life, an' now they've cast me off. I won't bear any more."

"That's the proper spirit," asserted the Patrol, gravely.

"A man is justified in bein' stern when he's drove ter the wall, ain't he?" inquired Abraham, seeking for information.

"Sure!"

"I've been misused, an' I don't care who hears me say it! They always thought I was no good; they never gave me any show at the plunder—I mean, they didn't use me well," amended Abe, with the haste of one who has been too frank. "I was only a dog fer them, anyhow. They said I wa'n't bright, but a phrenologist told me I had a fine head. My wife has always abused me; I've been only an errand boy. Now, they've cast me off!"

Her voice was shrill as he made his complaint, and he doubled up a little hand and shook a little fist in wrath.

Unknown to him, he had given far more of his history than he had put in words. Flipper Flynn easily understood why he had stood so poorly with his wife and the gang. Clearly, he was as vicious as any of the party, but Nature had not given him an average share of brains, and it would have been a rash person who would trust him with important secrets.

It had been natural, but far from prudent, to cast him off.

The Patrol was prompt to take advantage of his anger.

"You've been misused shamefully, Mr. Jacobs!" he asserted; and then proceeded to supplement the statement with other remarks which would please the listener.

The artifice was successful, and Jacobs was soon of the opinion he had found those who could appreciate his ability. With this idea started it was not hard to get him talking on the matter nearest to the Patrol's thoughts. Introducing the subject guardedly, Abe was soon under way like a race-horse.

"My wife is a bad woman, an' I don't care who knows it!" he declared. "She has been the ally of crooks ever since I knew her—though, of course," was the hasty addition, "I never approved of it. Yes, she is a bad woman!"

He paused to shake his head dolefully over this fact; then went on less sorrowfully:

"But you want to know about Isaac Moss. Well, I'll tell you all I can. You see, my wife has been the dive-keeper for the crooks she has been in with; an' her two best bowers hev been Old Spicer, the tramp—he needn't wear old clothes, ef he didn't see fit ter—an' a feller named Gilbert Dunning."

"W'ot of Harold Dunning?" asked Flipper.

"Never heard o' him, but there are men in the gang that I never hev seen. Wal, it was Gilbert who brought Isaac Moss there. He an' Moss was rivals fer the hand o' some girl, an' Gilbert found a way ter get rid o' the rival. He give Isaac some drug that took his wits away, an' brought him to our ranch. He's been there ever sence."

"Rivals, eh? Be you sure it wa'n't a money affair?"

"Yes."

"W'ot's Isaac's real name?"

"Dunno!"

"Lionel Hethington?"

"No; that's another case."

"It is?"

"Yes. Lionel Hethington is an Englishman. They hev got him, too; though I don't know much about it. But Isaac ain't no Englishman."

Now the fact was presented to his notice, the Patrol was obliged to admit, mentally, that this was probably the case. Certainly, Isaac had none of the distinguishing traits of the foreigner; though Flipper had not paused to think of that before. He now blamed himself for the fact. Why had he not used his judgment in the case?

"There was money in the matter of Hethington," went on the cast-off, "an' they hev got him shut up, somewhere. That is all I know about him. But it is Isaac we are speaking about. I know he was downed because he and Gilbert were rivals; that is all I do know."

"Well, where is the den your wife an' her pards have taken Isaac to?" asked Flipper, after a pause.

"I don't know. They are bound I sha'n't know, either. They've shook me; an' they think they have got a clear coast."

He paused to shake his fist tragically, giving the impression that he did not agree with this opinion; and Flipper went on skillfully. He found it hard to believe that Abe was wholly ignorant of the new refuge of the gang, but Abe declared such to be the fact, and there was no reason for doubting his good faith.

It was plain that the Patrol must still rely upon himself; the way to success was still shrouded in darkness.

"One thing is clear," he remarked to Betty, "we hev got ter rescue Isaac by hook or crook, an' we'll do it ef it takes a rib out o' our anatomy. You hear me?"

CHAPTER XII.

A MAN BACKS DOWN.

ABE JACOBS was in a vindictive mood, and ready to catch eagerly at any plan which promised revenge upon his wife and her companions. As a result, he also agreed to remain at the house for the time being, and give Flipper Flynn a chance to "see a friend," who was, though Abe was not informed of the fact, Detective Moran; after which, he averred, he was ready to proceed against the gang as zealously as the Patrol could desire.

Knowing he was not so trustworthy as his promises indicated, the boy asked Betty to keep him under her espionage, and try to prevent his departure from the house.

The Flipper made another effort to see Moran. It was as fruitless as the previous attempts.

"Wal, this is getting stale!" was Flipper's disgusted comment. "I ain't goin' ter monkey no more on these lines. Mister Moran kin run his engine; I'll run mine."

He was near the house to which Roger

Hethington had first conducted him, and as he was passing, he instinctively glanced up at the windows. The result gave him surprise.

Roger was there looking out calmly.

"Howlin' hyenas!"

The Patrol was astonished. He had given the Englishman up as a lost man; yet there he was, and nothing showed him to be in a bad state, physically or otherwise.

Only for a moment did Flipper hesitate. Then he crossed the street and gave the bell a sharp ring. Nobody objected to his going up to his sometime employer's room, and he soon found himself confronting Roger. The latter did not appear surprised to see him.

"So it's you?" he saluted.

"Ez fer ez I know, it ain't nobody else, general. Kin you say the same fer R. Hethington, E-quire? B'jinks! I thought you was gone up the flume, sure!"

"My movements must have seemed strange to you."

"So they did, an' I ain't got over it, yet. I'm all primed fer a narrative of the facts, however."

"When I went up to the room in the hotel I did not expect to be gone over a few minutes, but I was delayed."

"What by?"

"Business with a gentleman."

Flipper looked hard at the speaker, and saw unmistakable signs that he was not going to be taken into the secrets of the case. His hopes took a drop, and he dryly inquired:

"Did he shed your blood?"

Roger became more interested, if appearances went for anything.

"Was there a disturbance over my disappearance?"

"Why do you think that?"

"When I arrived, the gentleman was suffering with an obstinate bleeding at the nose. Some of the effects were to be seen on the bed-spread. I hope it did not lead to any foolish misconstructions?"

"Well, I thought you must 'a' had a quarrel with the unknown gent."

"There was none; our interview was of the most friendly kind."

"You skipped out kind o' sudden."

"The gentleman thought he possibly could get some information for me, and we went out together. That was all there was of it. Really, I hope no old cranks made a row about it?"

Roger looked hard at the Patrol. He evidently was somewhat concerned, and wished to know just what had occurred. On the other hand, Flipper was the most disgusted person in New York, at that moment.

"Ain't you made any discoveries?" he asked.

"No; and I am tempted to give up the whole matter and go back to England."

"I wouldn't, ef I's you!"

"Why not?"

"Because you'll only get some one hold o' the case that won't be lukewarm, like you! Roger, I'm dead onter you! You think ve kin set on yer chair an' lie ter me like a 2:10 boss in a free-fer-all, but you make a big error. Let up on it, Britisher! You didn't meet no friends, up in the hotel bedroom; you met an enemy, an' you had a right-smart row with him. Oh! I'm onter you an' Gilbert Dunning, Esquire. You bet!"

Flipper flung out these words as if each one was a bullet, nor could he feel that his ammunition was wasted. Roger first looked startled; then his face took on a peculiar pallor.

"You talk at random," he muttered.

"I talk to the point, an' don't you forget it!"

"What do you claim to know?"

"Enough so you'd better tell me more," and the Patrol shut one eye and nodded emphatically.

Hethington looked disturbed, but after meditating for a few moments, his courage returned. Perhaps he saw how unlikely it was that Flipper could know enough of his case to place him in any position different from that he now occupied. Pretending to smile with amusement, he answered:

"Don't let your curiosity run away with you, my lad. There is no secret about this matter, and—"

"Does your lost brother think so?" Flipper retorted.

"Happily, my brother is found, all right."

"Gammon!"

"What?"

"Ef you see fit ter throw me over, all well an' good; but don't ye think you kin set there an' stuff me fer a clam. It can't be did, general. You know, an' I know, that Lionel Hethington is still in quod. Et would be sorter interestin'

ter know who his worst enemy is, but we ain't discussin' of that point, now. W'ot we do say, mister, an' we say it strong, is: Don't get the idea in that British head o' yourn that you kin sell an Uncle Sam kid fer a blind man. See?"

Flipper Flynn was angry, and he made his points with a realism that was very unpleasant to the gentleman from the British Isles.

Roger flushed deeply.

"Your language is remarkable, and it is insolent. Such being the fact, I do not think it necessary for me to carry on the discussion. I have already paid you all I agreed to when you entered my service, but if you are disappointed at losing a situation, I will add to it. Here, take this bank-note, and let us part friends—"

"Pocket yer cash, colonel! I ain't built that way, b'jinks! I'm a fellow who can't be bought, sold, give away nor taken in. Them is my sentiments!"

Flipper arose in offended majesty and glowered upon Roger like a Bowery tragedian. He was much disappointed that his hold on Hethington was lost, he also felt offended that any one should think he was to be deceived so easily. He went to the door and there paused and gave Mr. Hethington a further illustration of Bowery stage effects.

The Englishman was troubled by this rebellion. He tried to smooth the matter over, but did it in a way which did not improve the situation. He did not offer to tell what had taken place since he saw the Patrol, and it was plain he would not do so.

Flipper let him talk for a while; then abruptly announced:

"I'm off!"

With this statement he marched out of the house, and Roger did not see fit to try and stop him. The Englishman was troubled, but he underrated the boy, and did not suspect his capacity for harm.

Flipper went out with long and heavy steps.

"Dumped!" he uttered, tragically. "I hev got the g. b., which is grand bounce. Yes; an' I've got one thing more: I know, now, that my first impressions of Roger were correct. Jest w'ot is chewin' of him I don't know, but he ain't no angelic cherub. Has he formed a union with them who was his enemies? Looks like it, but in any case, I'm glad I ain't in his brother's shoes. The other Hethington bids fair ter get did up the worst way. Hello! who's that? Old Spicer, the tramp, b'jinks! Say, I'm goin' ter foller that feller ter his den. I'll hive him!"

CHAPTER XIII.

FLIPPER FLYNN'S PERIL.

THERE was a good deal of spite, as well as detective zeal, in the Patrol's decision, for he had not recovered from the shock Hethington had given him; but it was all detective caution as he fell in behind the ragged member of Mother Jacobs's gang.

Old Spicer seemed to be in an unusually chipper mood. He whistled and hummed snatches of songs as he went; and in every way acted like a man whose conscience and digestion were alike in the best of order.

For these things Flipper Flynn cared nothing, but he was bound to bring matters to a crisis if such a thing was possible.

Old Spicer did not change his general direction once, and in due time he entered a house which was evidently his home, whether the gang hung out there or not.

"Dusty, musty, rusty an' suspicious!" commented Flipper. "Old chap, kin you get in there?"

He made a feint to pass by in an innocent manner, keeping his eyes open for all chances, and he was not disappointed. The basement door was ajar; more than that, he could see no one near it. Acting on a sudden impulse, he walked boldly down the steps.

"It's touch an' go, old chap; you don't want ter get ketched in here. Keep an eye out!"

The timely warning did not prevent him from entering the door. He gazed around sharply. No one was visible, but from the next room, the kitchen, it seemed, came the sound of voices.

"B'jinks! I must see 'em!"

With him to resolve was to act, and he crept noiselessly down the hall. View of the kitchen did not exhilarate him to any great degree; he could see no one there except two women who looked like servants. They were doing the housework, and gossiping as they worked.

"Pretty times these are!" observed one. "We are liable ter bring up in Sing Sing yet."

"I don't like it."

"Nor I; but we get paid for the risks we take. I'm willin' ter venture it, ain't you?"

"Sure, sure! We're in for it, and there's no

backin' down on my part. In fact, we can't back down; we have got so deep in the mire we must keep on, anyhow."

"It's all right, too. I'm satisfied. Keep yer eye always open, Meg; the young feller is a prisoner up-stairs. Should he get away, it's good-by ter us!"

"Sure! But he won't get away; there's no traitors in this house, an' we all are on the watch."

At this point Flipper Flynn heard a sound behind him, which drew his attention at once. It was that of footsteps; a sound he had occasion to look upon with fear. He turned quickly, and was just in time to see a man emerge from the covered way at the foot of the stairs, and go to the outer door. Reaching that point, he calmly turned the key, and the Patrol suppressed an inclination to whistle in dismay.

His retreat had been cut off!

The man then entered the front room. Flipper meditated. He was now confident he had again run the gang to earth, and that Isaac Moss was in the house! This was an important point gained, but one other person was there, also—the Patrol, himself.

"Shall I go up the stairs an' take a sneak, or shall I waltz up ter Isaac's room an' hustle him out! He may be stronger, now, than he was then, an' the thing might be possible. Still, I don't guess you want ter be too funny, old chap. My advice is, skip while you kin!"

He proceeded to attempt this plan, though the chances would have impressed an ordinary person as very unpromising. Luck attended him at the start, however; he passed the front part of the hall without attracting the attention of him who had entered the front room. Then he stole lightly up to the "parlor floor."

The hall was unoccupied.

Success seemed certain, but he had a shock as he laid his hand on the knob.

The front door was locked!

"Howlin' hyenas! I'm in fer it!"

His lugubrious comment was not an exaggeration. With the way of escape cut off it seemed his troubles were only just beginning.

While he hesitated there was a stir in the parlor, and he believed some one was coming out. His wits moved quickly. He turned and ran up the next flight, two steps at a time. On reaching the top he paused to look back. What he saw showed how wisely he had acted in moving so promptly.

Mrs. Jacobs and Gilbert Dunning were there!

"I've got 'em!" Flipper muttered, exultantly. "Yes; an' b'jinks! they've got me! It's a tie all 'round, but I guess I'm worse tied than anybody else. Old chap, keep yer brain-dish clear, or you'll be a done-up kid!"

At this moment the bell rung, and Gilbert opened the door with the air of a man who feels sure he knows who has applied. The result did not disappoint him; he cordially greeted a man who had the natural marks of a rascal all over him. They began to talk, but not in voices audible to the Patrol. The latter improved the chance to look around and find out his exact situation.

It was what was to be expected, for the house was like all of its class. He shook his head.

"Don't see no way ter get out only ter fly, an' I ain't got my wings with me. Old chap, you've got ter saw wood an' say nothin'!"

The trio below suddenly turned toward the stairs, and the Patrol hurried into the room nearest him. It overlooked the street, and he was of the opinion that the enemy could not safely do injury to him while he was so well situated for giving the alarm.

"Mebbe the fun's only jest beginnin', old chap," he muttered; and then, seeing the door to the next room had a transom over it, he mounted to a chair to get a look that way.

The first glance made him start. Isaac Moss was there!

The prisoner looked none the worse for his recent experiences, but his expression was gloomy.

Flipper had no time to investigate further. Steps close at hand warned him to save himself. He looked around hastily. Only one way was presented to his notice: the generous-sized table had a cover which hung almost to the floor. It was a timely refuge, and he gave one dive and was out of sight.

Three persons entered. They were Gilbert, Old Spicer and the new-comer. All sat down near the concealed Patrol, who gazed at them with a good deal of uneasiness. Dunning was not of repulsive appearance, and Spicer was only the typical tramp; but he who had come last was of different mold. Flipper thought he never had seen a more vicious and murderous

face. It served to show him plainly what company he was in.

"Now, Blogg," began Gilbert, "I think we need not waste time in getting down to business?"

"Not a bit," returned Blogg, in a hoarse voice.

"I have sent for you—"

"I know; ter do the feller up!"

"Plainly, that is it."

"I knew that before. Don't beat around the bush! You want the feller done up! Well, lay out yer plan."

"This is delicate work!" observed Gilbert, nervously.

"Not a bit; every-day affair."

"It may be for you, but is not for me. Don't think me a softy," the speaker hurriedly, and apologetically added: "I have done my share of delicate work, but not in this line. See?"

"Yes; I see you are nervous; but you will get used ter it when you hev done a few jobs of the kind."

Gilbert shivered. It was plain that he had not advanced far enough in villainy to match Mr. Blogg's calm unconcern, and he shrunk from the deed he had himself planned. Blogg rolled a chew of tobacco placidly in his big mouth and added:

"Ain't we losin' time?"

"We are," Gilbert agreed, with a start.

"Well, sir, the man we are to speak of is in the next room. He will not be a hard person to manage, for he is so enfeebled with disease that he cannot even stand."

"Don't keer ef he's as strong as Goliath! Talk on!"

It was clear that the speaker did not approve of slow work, and Dunning took the hint and became terse enough for the occasion.

"I have an enemy in there. I was a fool ever to take him; now I have him, he is a millstone on my hands. I dare not let him go. Hearing from Old Spicer that you were accustomed to help folks out, I want you to do so by me."

"It shall be done ter-night!"

"How?"

"How? Why, jest walk in an' stampon him!"

"Do you think you can arrange it so we shall not be found out?"

"No danger, at all. Ez fer gittin' him away, I'll hev my wagon at the door in good time. You see, when I do a job I always employ the same driver. It's business way, an' it's safest, too. I hev got this thing reduced to a science. The result is, no slip-ups; no squealin', no perleece no-sin' around. Yes; it's a mere business, an' I'm proud o' the way I hev it figgered down!"

The atrocious scoundrel's manner bore witness to his words, and even hardened Old Spicer moved uneasily in his chair.

Pride in such a trade was a horror.

And Flipper Flynn thought the whole matter, men and all, was off the same piece. What would be his fate if he was discovered?

CHAPTER XIV.

DARING THE DOOM.

THE three men continued to go over the details until the whole affair was arranged to their satisfaction. At one o'clock in the night the wagon was to be at the door, and the burden was to be ready for it! Gilbert did not get more nerve as the discussion progressed, but Blogg promised to take charge of the final act, and dispose of Isaac Moss in a neat and business way.

Flipper Flynn found it hard to credit that any one could be quite so villainous, but he had Blogg's own assurance to prove it.

The fellow intended to dispose of Isaac as lightly as if that unfortunate was only a dog.

"Lucky I come here," thought the Patrol. "Yes, it's lucky—if I don't get done up, myself!"

Gilbert continued nervous, showing that he had outstripped his nerve in this last step in crime.

"Can't you rush the growler?" asked Blogg, presently.

Dunning thought he could, and Old Spicer was sent out for that purpose. Mr. Blogg grew more interested. He drew up to the table, thus placing himself within a few inches of the Patrol. He had a keen taste for beer, and proved it when the article arrived. He drank copiously, and his mood grew jovial.

"I ain't goin' ter leave here until the fun is over!" he declared. "I like here, an' I like your company. Bring paper an' ink, an' I'll write ter my man so he'll hev the wagon 'round in time. This'll give us a chance ter paint the town red while we wait."

Gilbert did not look particularly pleased over the plan, but he could not object. He had

placed himself in Blogg's power, and must make the best of his company. The latter went for the writing materials as if to a personal encounter with an enemy, but managed to write the letter after a fashion. When it was done, he gave all his time to enjoying the beer.

His companions had to keep him company still—something which was very much to Old Spicer's taste, but severe upon Gilbert. The latter was already experiencing the results of having sold himself to a bigger villain than he ever had dared to be, himself.

Flipper Flynn began to find his position unpleasant. He could not move about at all, and this, a trifle at the start, finally grew painful. He found aches and pains creeping into his bones, and there was no prospect of relief.

Outside, darkness had fallen. Lamps were lighted, and the evening began to wear on. It was, however, still a long way to the hour set for Blogg's work.

That person grew somewhat hilarious.

He rose and executed a clumsy dance, after which he remarked that he saw no reason why he should take life too laboriously.

"I'm goin' ter lay down an' be happy," he asserted, and at once put his plan into execution.

Disdaining the offer of the lounge, he tipped his chair up at an angle and used it for a reclining place. This did not interest either Gilbert or Old Spicer, but it had a striking interest for Flipper Flynn. The change of position not only brought Blogg nearer to the Patrol, but they were now on the same level. The fellow's back was toward Flipper, but he had only to turn his head slightly and he would see the now-demoralized spy.

This he was liable to do at any time.

He reached over his head and played with the cloth of the table. As it swung back and forth it each time struck the spy. He gained an opinion of Blogg which momentarily increased in severity. He longed to come out of ambush and give the ruffian a specimen of justice, but decided to defer hostilities until a more favorable time.

Old Spicer fell asleep in his chair. Gilbert moved uneasily, and wished for the end. Only Blogg was calm and content. There was no limit to his erratic notions.

"Why shouldn't we get that job out o' our way?" he finally asked. "Hev we got ter wait fer the wagon ter come? Wal, I should say not. Le's run it off!"

"Had we better?" returned Dunning, nervously.

"Why not?"

"Well, I don't know."

"Nor me! Le's git a move on!"

"Old Spicer is asleep."

"Let him sleep; we don't want him!"

Blogg scrambled to his feet. Now the notion had struck him he was eager to proceed, and just enough under the influence of liquor to be deaf to the wishes of others. He faced Gilbert like a demon brought up from some nameless region; while the master of the place brushed his hand nervously across his forehead. There was perspiration there which was not occasioned by atmospheric heat.

"I don't know!" he muttered.

"Do ye want the job done, or not?"

Blogg spoke sharply, and it was enough to recall Gilbert's former frame of mind. He remembered that Isaac Moss stood in the way of his pet plans; he hardened his heart.

"Your way is best, no doubt. It shall be as you say. Give me your instructions; they shall be followed to the letter."

Blogg chuckled, as if he had won a great victory.

"Go get a piller," he directed. "There's nothin' like it fer quick an' silent work. I'll wait fer you in the hall."

He moved that way, and this time Gilbert did not hesitate. Both passed out, leaving Old Spicer asleep in his chair. The door had hardly closed upon them before Flipper Flynn was out of his ambush.

"Howlin' hyenas! but ain't I got ter git a move on!" was his excited exclamation.

It was clear that only quick work would save Isaac Moss. He could not be reached by way of the hall, for Blogg was lingering there. What other means existed?

The Patrol's gaze wandered to the transom. It was unusually large, and he felt sure he could pass through it, if left alone. Would Old Spicer condescend to sleep on? Flipper sprang forward and reached the connecting doors. Previous investigation had shown them to be locked, so he lost no time there. He wheeled a chair up to the point and leaped into it. This brought him to the level of the tran-

som, and he calculated the chances with steady nerve.

"I kin make it!" he decided.

He grasped the transom and drew himself up. There was a period of doubt and uncertainty. It was no easy matter to pass through, and even if he accomplished it, Old Spicer might awaken at the most inopportune moment. Flipper had only one chance, however, and he took it. He succeeded in gaining the desired height, and then he squeezed through and dropped lightly on the other side.

Isaac Moss had been sleeping, but he awakened, now. He looked startled, but when he recognized the Patrol, his old, peculiar lightness came to the front.

"Hallo, you!" was his matter-of-fact greeting.

"Isaac, they're comin'!" Flipper declared.

"Who?"

"The assassins, an' they're goin' ter do you up!"

Isaac's mood changed. He never would have been in a mood of levity while in that house if his mind had been in its normal condition; but the last startling announcement was enough to do away with even unnatural lightness.

He started half way from his chair.

"What?" he exclaimed.

"No use o' mincin' matters, mister. You are ter be done up, right off, unless you git a move on."

"Have you a plan?"

"No."

"Then why are you here? Would you go to ruin with me?"

"B'jinks! I ain't goin' ter see a feller git done fer, an' I set down like a clam an' do nothin'. I know as well as anybody that we are in a p'izen fix, but we'll sink or swim tergether, Isaac!"

"Your stand is brave and noble, but I am really sorry you have sacrificed yourself for me. What can we do?"

With the question thus plainly put, the Patrol tried to get the proper answer. True, what could they do? He looked anxiously at the companion of his misfortunes.

"Can't you walk, at a pinch?" he demanded.

"Give me your arm."

"It was done, and Isaac made a brave effort, but he had to give it up. He sunk back with a groan.

"Useless! I am as helpless as a child."

"I can't carry you out."

"Boy, do not think of me. There is no reason why you should go to ruin with me; it will do me no good, and you will only throw your life away. Don't linger here. Go!—get away while you can. Go! go!"

It was a manly appeal, but he was speaking to one as stout-hearted as himself. Flipper did not waver.

"We are in fer it in company. Nary a desert will I be guilty of. I don't see the way clear, but we'll fight it out on this line. Ha! is that them a-comin'?"

There were footsteps in the hall, and some one began to fumble at the door. Isaac groaned aloud.

"Why didn't you go while there was a chance? Now it is too late. May Providence have mercy on you, brave boy; I am worse than helpless. Ah! they come!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE MAN-SLAYERS.

THE door opened and a man entered. He was a stranger to Isaac, but not to Flipper Flynn. It was Blogg. At this crisis Gilbert Dunning had no wish to appear; he had kept back, and the human brute was alone. He looked the character he had assumed. His evil face was full of a light which would have made the stoutest-hearted tremble, and in his hand he bore the pillow with which he was to end the life of the unfortunate prisoner.

Isaac looked for Flipper, and felt a thrill of relief as he noticed that the boy had seized the chance to get out of sight.

It was Isaac's most earnest prayer that he would keep thus concealed. Then he thought of himself. Blogg was advancing, and the pillow was held well forward.

"Who are you?" the prisoner demanded, in a whisper.

Blogg smiled easily.

"A friend o' yours."

"I don't know you."

"You'll know me better after a bit!"

The brute chuckled, as if there was some good joke in the matter, and all the while he was sidling toward Isaac.

"Keep off!" the latter exclaimed, with as

much voice as he could command. "Keep away from me!"

"Take it easy, cherub! You an' me needn't hev a bit o' trouble; there ain't any reason why we should."

All the while he continued his sideways advance, his eyes now gleaming with a most startling light. So might a cat creep upon its prey, but no comparison could make plain the glitter of those awful eyes. At the beginning, Isaac had half-started up, but he now sat motionless. He did not even think of trying to escape; his every sense was numbed save that of terror.

"Man," he spoke, still in that husky whisper, "would you do murder?"

"I'll show ye, my little one!"

Grinning, to show his amusement, Blogg leaped forward. Now, the pillow was held up, where he could readily cast it around Isaac's head and shut off both outcry and life, and the deed would quickly have been done, but at the very moment of success there was a check to proceedings.

Blogg reeled back from a heavy blow and nearly fell to the floor.

Flipper Flynn had disappeared for the time, but he had not deserted his friend. He had watched all, and his breath had come and gone in a way as if it was about to fail him entirely.

Then he sprung from the cover of the bed; he leaped upon the man-slayer like a panther. Blogg reeled back from that stroke; then, recovering his balance, stood gazing in dumfounded wonder at the person who had dared to step between him and his prey.

And that person a boy!

As he realized that fact his stupefaction passed away, but his wonder only grew. A boy! And he had dared to come in his way! Blogg brushed his hand across his face to assure his own amazed self that he saw aright. Yes; and there was the boy confronting him in a cool and resolute way.

"Say," the ruffian finally found breath to utter, "What do you think ye've done?"

"I've got one on you, mister!" the Patrol retorted. "You can't go on with no sech work."

"Kid, who be you?"

"Never mind who I be."

"I'll call the boss—"

"Nobody here is my boss. I sorter run on my own hook, ye see. An' jest now, my way runs contrary ter yours. See?"

"You've come between me an' my work. You've dared ter interfere with me, an' I'll make you sweat fer it, ef you don't take a tumble right away. Get out o' here!"

"Nary get, mister! I'm here ter stay, an' don't you ferget it. You needn't ruffle up yer back ter me, neither, fer I won't scare fer a cent. I've got you foul!"

Just what he meant Flipper did not know. He had taken the risks and secured a reprieve for Isaac, but no one was more plainly aware that he was perfectly helpless. He could not fight Blogg; he could not even resort to flight, for Isaac was not in condition to accompany him. He was keeping up the talk, but in a frame of mind which had no ray of light. The worst was to be expected.

Blogg was beginning to recover from his amazement. He did not know his opponent, nor did he have cause to suspect him of being an intruder. Of course he thought a regular inmate of the house was before him, but it enraged him that any one should dare to act such a part.

"Kid," he spoke, in a grating voice, "get out o' here, or I'll walk all over you. Get!"

He advanced upon the Patrol, but the boy did not retreat. This would have been useless; he might as well stand his ground, now.

"Stop!" he commanded, deeply. "You are contemplatin' a work you ought ter be ashamed on. This man is so weak he can't stand up. He is that feeble a child might boast over him. I tell ye, mister, you would be a coward ter touch him—you, a man in all yer strength. Don't ye dare ter touch him!"

"Say!" exclaimed Blogg, amazed again, "you ain't one o' Dunning's men, you ain't!"

"I'm thankful ter say I ain't. No, sir; I'm off a different piece."

"Then you're a blamed spy! I doubted ye from the first; now I hev ye foul. You're a spy, an' by the fiends! I'll do ye up!"

Blogg was not half so far-seeing as he pretended, but he wanted an excuse to vent his passions upon the boy, and he had found it. Once more he advanced, and Isaac broke his silence.

"Go, go! Save yourself, while you can. Don't delay a moment! Go!"

"Not much! We sink or swim tergether!"

Sturdy as ever the Patrol made the assertion, but he had time only for Blogg, now. Once more the ruffian was advancing upon him. The

pillow was again the offensive weapon, and with it he meant to smother out the boy's life.

Flipper had picked up a fire-shovel; the only visible weapon, but a very poor one, after all. He watched Blogg's wildly-glittering eyes and waited for the attack.

Suddenly the slayer leaped forward.

Flipper struck fiercely with his novel weapon, but in vain. Blogg was an old hand at the business; he dodged the blow neatly, and wrested the shovel away without difficulty. Then he seized the Patrol and bent him over his knee.

"Oh! you like this biz, do you?" he growled.

"Well, you shall have yer fill!"

He tried to bring the pillow around and press it over Flipper's face, but the latter suddenly and neatly writhed out of his grasp. He was almost clear of the assassin when Blogg managed to seize him by the foot. Flipper was drawn back, and the man's hand sought his mouth. Driven to bay, the Patrol grappled; he made a great effort and tripped his enemy neatly.

They fell together, but Blogg managed to keep his hold. Then he wound his arms around the slither form and contracted his hold.

"I'll fix you but!" he hissed.

Isaac Moss uttered a loud cry.

"Help! help!" he shouted. "Do with me as you will, but don't make another suffer for me! Save this child!"

He had no very clear idea of what he aimed to do, but the appeal rose with the force of one thoroughly in earnest.

Flipper was struggling energetically, but in vain. Blogg forced him down to the position he aspired to have him in, and then panted:

"I've got ye, now!"

He did not have him; the Patrol was fighting with surprising skill, and once more he partially broke the hostile hold. He could not, however, get away entirely, and the end was near. Blogg swung him over his knee, and with an exultant laugh, lay hold of his neck.

"This settles it!" was his fresh cry of triumph.

Flipper was helpless, at last. Too proud to beg for mercy he awaited the end. Blogg compressed his throat.

Just then there was a husky cry at the door; a cry so strange that even the slayer ceased his work and looked up. There stood Gilbert Dunning, pale and trembling, his hand outstretched toward Blogg.

"Stop!" he gasped.

"Eh?" questioned the slayer.

"Let the boy alone!"

"What's that?"

"I tell you to let him alone!"

Silently the parties to the scene gazed at each other. Gilbert was the one most moved. His face was still pale, and he held to the side of the door as if his strength was not sufficient to support him. A more surprising interruption could not have come.

"I don't know ez I heerd right," remarked Blogg, in bewilderment.

"You are to let that boy alone!"

"But he wouldn't let me at the other feller."

"I have seen all, heard all. I know how it was as well as you. We need not argue the matter further. The boy must not be harmed!"

"Begad! ef you want the man silenced, the kid goes, too! I won't do a job an' hev a witness who will most likely swear my life away, the first chance he gets. You hear me?"

"Rest easy: it is not asked of you. The man, too, is to be left in safety. Your work is done."

Gilbert was recovering from his trembling fit, and his voice began to ring out clearly. He had the air of one who had lost an important cause, but, mingled with it, there was an air of relief.

"An'—an' you ain't goin' ter—goin' ter hev the feller done up at all?"

Blogg asked the question as if something was the matter with his power of speech. He was amazed and angry.

"You can go at any time, sir. You will be fully paid for your work and trouble; further than that you need not be concerned. The man will not be injured!"

"Well, you're a clam! Clam? You're a blamed fool! You're a howlin' idiot! Drat yer life! don't yer know this may send us all ter the jug fer nobody knows how many years? You howlin' idiot, you!"

Mr. Blogg could not find words in which to express his feelings properly, so he relieved his mind by swinging his arms about wildly and grimacing in a way which was grotesque.

Gilbert did not change his decision. It was not easy to get the slayer quieted down, but he did this at last and conducted him out of the room. In the hall he doubtless had orders to wait, for Gilbert returned to the prisoners.

His expression promised nothing favorable. "Men," he spoke, abruptly, "you have looked your last on the light of day!"

"How's that?" Flipper asked, a little at fault. "You have won one point, here, but it is less a gain than you may think. You are life prisoners; you have looked your last on the world!"

"Wot new scheme hev you got?" "I cannot recede from the position I have taken. I have risked all and must take the consequences. It is not in me to be an assassin, but further than that I am as much your foe as ever. Your lives are saved—at least for the present; but you will both remain my prisoners. You, boy, have seen fit to go against me in my plans. The result of it will be seen. I am going to make you a prisoner, too, and you will be well taken care of."

"Mister, you hev done one good deed ter-night; why not keep it up an' set us free?"

"I refuse to talk with you. Be still!"

He stepped to the door and called for Old Spicer, who came promptly, and they conferred in low tones. Neither of the prisoners interrupted. They felt it would be useless to try and move them, and they had to be as near satisfied as was possible.

Flipper Flynn, however, was not in a down-hearted mood. He felt he had won one glorious victory already; he could afford to be content where he could not better matters.

He looked at Issac and nodded in a confident way, and the original prisoner was as grateful as a man naturally would be when his life had thus been saved.

The captors soon settled upon a plan. Old Spicer went out. When he returned he bore a rope, and this he proceeded to attach to the chandelier in an ingenious way. When it was done, Flipper was led to the spot and firmly bound, a novel device making the restraint perfect.

"Here you stay to die of old age," Gilbert announced, pitilessly.

CHAPTER XVI.

SOMEBODY IN DISGUISE.

Two persons came along the street. One was a woman of rather shabby appearance and eccentrically-made garments; the other was a girl of diminutive stature. In the latter person we recognize Betty Gray.

"Ain't you afeerd?" she asked.

"No," her companion answered; "I am afraid of nothing."

"You don't look so brave."

"I was not, a week ago!"

"You feel this bad, Miss Viola—"

"Hush!" was the quick warning. "Don't speak that name again. Remember, I am only Zylpha, the wanderer."

"I won't forget again."

"This is the house. Now for a bold push. Be calm, Betty; I don't believe you are in any danger, and if you are, they certainly would not do anything serious to one as young as you."

"Guess you don't 'zactly know 'em, but I ain't goin' ter git skeered. You see if I do!"

There was a spice of defiance in Betty's voice, showing that she resented the aspersion, as she understood it, upon her bravery, and she rung the bell with a steady hand. The door was soon opened, and Mother Jacobs stood before them.

"Betty Gray!" she cried; "you here? Why, child, where have you been? We thought you was lost."

Betty had her opinion of the sincerity of this greeting, but she did not see fit to quarrel with Mother Jacobs when her chief ambition was to be well received by the woman.

"Well, I sorter got strayed away," she muttered, "but I ain't lost, as you kin see."

"Was it the fault o' that cabman? I have all alone stuck to it that 'twas; an' I've done all I could ter find you ag'in. Did that rascal git you lost?"

There was sincerity in the woman's voice, and Betty began to waver in her belief that she had been deliberately cast off by the gang. From the first there had been wonder that Mother Jacobs should wish to lose one who had been such a hard-working, uncomplaining slave, and Betty was impressed with the belief that the separation might, indeed, have been due wholly to a cabman who had been paid for his work, and had no check on his impulses.

Now, however, Mother Jacobs suddenly gave attention to Betty's companion.

"Who is this?" she asked, doubtfully.

"It's a lady who has been kind to me, an' kept me, an' she has been teaching me ter be a clairvoyant doctor."

A sudden change came over the old woman's

face. She dropped a deep courtesy, and remarked:

"Your servant, ma'am!"

"Daughter, be of good cheer!" spoke Viola, in a deep voice. "All is well with thee, for thy star is burning brightly."

"Praise Providence!" uttered Jacobs, devoutly.

"The unseen powers know their faithful ones. They have them in their keeping—yea, always!"

"An' I am one of 'um?"

"Thou art one!"

"Glory! glory!"

Mother Jacobs seemed delighted beyond measure; she took on a rapt expression, and was forgetful of all the practical things of life. It was no chance hit that had brought them into her good graces. While with her, Betty had learned many things more than she had been given credit for being capable of taking in. No one had ever said in plain words that the old woman was particularly susceptible to shams, things mysterious and things obscure, yet Betty, as observant as she was silent, had learned the points of Mother Jacobs's character well. It was this which had brought them there so fully prepared to work on her weaknesses.

"I will be going, now," added Viola, carelessly.

"No, no!" Mother Jacobs implored. "Ef you see any good in me, don't desert me so soon. Them like you are always welcome at my home."

"I suppose I might tarry for awhile."

"Come in; come in, ef you will. You honor my abode. Come; you are very welcome, Mrs.—I don't know your name."

"I am Madam Zylpha, clairvoyant, seventh daughter of a seventh son, far-seer and natural physician!"

It was an imposing load for one person to carry, but Viola bore her assumed honors with due grace and dignity, and Jacobs was more than ever impressed. She eagerly asked the great woman in, and proceeded to make her comfortable.

Self-styled Zylpha and Betty were in a state of expectancy. Thus far their plot had succeeded as well as any one could dare to hope, even with their knowledge of their companion's weaknesses. They were in the house, and received with warmth where they would have been shut out entirely had the truth been known.

They were conducted to the dining-room and a chair was set for the honored guest. Betty was forgotten, entirely.

Now, they had not come there merely to see Mother Jacobs, either to play upon her credulity or otherwise to make a trivial gain. Instead, they had business of vast importance, in their opinion. It was for this they had planned with care, that Viola had assumed a disguise, that she had claimed greatness in a line of which she had possessed no knowledge until Betty had chanced to let drop the secret of the old woman's hobby.

Unknown to any one else, they had come into danger, to the company of desperate characters. And their motive—it was no idle one.

Jacobs had much to say, and she was humored to her fill. In return, the great Zylpha told her of great good that was coming to her—when, it was not exactly clear.

The first step was taken; they were under the roof; and after that it was not hard to so work upon the hostess that, of her own free will, she invited Zylpha to become her guest for a time.

The chance was not refused.

Thus they entered upon a work which might bring ruin to them.

Mother Jacobs was not a person of unlimited leisure, and after a time she had other duties to perform, but Zylpha showed no inclination to make free with the house. She kept in the kitchen; her behavior was beyond censure.

When supper had been eaten Jacobs had more time, and there was another period given up to humoring her fancies. Night fell, too, and the hour drew near when something must be done if the plans of the adventurous two amounted to anything. They could not hope to remain a very long while in such company and not meet with trouble, good as Viola's disguise was believed to be.

Betty had sunk into her old round of labor and was fully occupied. She used her senses of investigation as well as possible, and discovered that there was a locked room on the floor above; a fact she succeeded in making known to Viola, but she could penetrate no further.

To enter this room became Viola's ambition.

As the night grew older the elder visitor claimed to be weary and was given a chance to lie down. This enabled her to be left alone and

she began to scheme anew. There were men in the house. This she had been told by Betty, and there was other evidence to that effect. If she encountered them, her chances bade fair to melt away like dew.

She was in a little room off from the hall. When the proper time seemed to have arrived, she rose and left the place. With light steps she ascended to the floor above.

Pausing she listened with fast-beating heart.

No one was astir, as far as she could discover.

She went on. It was not hard to locate the room Betty had mentioned, but, as was to be expected, she found the door locked. Turning, she passed into the adjoining room. Only the double doors were in her way, then, and they were secured by a bolt. She laid her hand on the obstacle and paused. What lay beyond? She had her opinion, but it might all be wrong. In any case, it was danger.

The bolt was pushed with trembling fingers.

She opened the door.

No light was burning beyond, and, at first, she could see absolutely nothing. Then her eyes became accustomed to the gloom, and she made out a form in the corner—some one occupying a big chair. She advanced with wavering courage. The person was looking at her, and she thought his manner enough-like that of a prisoner for her to hazard speech.

"Who are you?" she asked, tremulously.

"Madam," was the very polite reply, "if you will answer your own question, I will give you my interest in the first gold-mine I find!"

"Sir? I don't understand."

"Nor I. Madam, I salute you! Great minds run in the same channel."

"Are you a prisoner here?"

"I have no doubt of it. Yes; as far as my knowledge goes, I am a prisoner. Consider the fact proven!"

This erratic speech swept away her last doubts; and she eagerly inquired:

"Are you Isaac Moss?"

"Regard that matter as proven, though I don't know a thing about it. I am called Isaac Moss, beyond doubt; who I am, I don't know."

"I have come to rescue you!"

"Ah! that's the point!"

"Have you yet recovered so you can walk?"

"Unfortunately, I have not. I am still a wreck. But who are you who has undertaken the dangerous task of getting me away? I tell you fairly that it is death to those who go into it. If you are thinking of pitting your solitary strength against that of my foes, stop while you can! I say, it is death! Keep away! The only hope is to go to the police. This I beg you to do, not so much for my sake as for that of another who has become involved in my desperate fortunes. Go! Go to the police, or go, never to return. Don't ruin yourself for me!"

Isaac made the appeal with far more than his usual earnestness, and rose as far as possible from his chair. He knew the danger, and was not willing to have any one else suffer with him.

"No!" Viola replied, firmly; "I have the best of reasons for not wishing the police to be in this matter, at all. I am going to get you out alone!"

"Woman, you are ruined if you attempt it!"

Isaac spoke warningly, but she was not to be moved. She put her hand around his waist and firmly directed:

"Come! This is a matter of will. Let nothing weaken your resolution, and you will win!"

It was a doctrine which past experiences had rendered non-persuasive to the prisoner, but he felt the need of doing his best. This he was endeavoring to do when the door was suddenly opened, the key having turned noiselessly in the lock. Viola sprung up and faced about. She could not misunderstand what it meant to her; it meant the very worst.

A match was scratched and the gas lighted. The blaze sprung up and made the whole room bright in a twinkling. She was face to face with a man whom Isaac readily recognized.

It was Old Spicer!

Viola was no person hardened to danger by long contact therewith, and she gazed in silent dismay at him who had so untimely come on the scene. It was left to Old Spicer to show unbounded amazement. He had no thought of finding a woman there, nor had he knowledge of the fact that one besides Mother Jacobs was under the roof.

Seeing her, he could only look in open-eyed wonder.

"Wal, I'll be durned!" he finally found breath to utter.

Viola said nothing.

"Say," he added, "who the dickens be you? W'ot ye doin' here? Don't you know it is sure

death ter come in here? Want ter run out the links o' yer life fer nothin', do ye? Wal, you're in a fair way!"

This address did not tend to increase Viola's confidence. She dimly remembered having planned what she would do in such a crisis, but she could not recall the plan, now. She turned to Isaac in the vague hope—grounded on what she could not tell—that he would be able to get her out of the dilemma. The result was surprising in the extreme. For the first time she saw Isaac distinctly. When she did so, Old Spicer was forgotten entirely.

She reeled back like a queen of tragedy and gazed at him in startled wonder. Then she dropped into a chair just in time to avoid falling to the floor. Her head swam dizzily, and she was strangely pale.

She had nothing to say.

"Wal, begosh!" remarked Old Spicer, "I don't understand this! What the howlin' monkeys is the racket, anyhow?"

Isaac did not answer, and the fellow's face brightened.

"One thing's clear," he added; "I've got the whole gang o' you foul!"

CHAPTER XVII.

POINTS WON AND LOST.

OLD SPICER looked like a very happy man, but he could not understand the new arrival. Failing to get any answer from Isaac, he looked at her sharply.

"I ain't on," he admitted. "Don't know her; never saw her—did I? Somebody eloocidate! Say, she's jest a-faintin', be gosh! What fer a game is this, anyhow?"

He rubbed his forehead in a very perplexed way, but was then relieved of the necessity of taking the lead in the affair. Gilbert Dunning entered. If he was less surprised than Spicer, the fact did not appear. He stopped short and looked in wonder.

"Who's this?" he demanded.

Viola looked up. Their eyes met. She was off her guard, and though the old clothes were still upon her, much of her true looks was revealed. Gilbert started back.

"Viola!" he uttered.

There was more than surprise in the exclamation; there was unbounded dismay; and he had cause for the feeling. She saw she was known and rallied surprisingly. Rising, she confronted him accusingly.

"Yes, Gilbert Dunning, it is I!" she exclaimed. "I have come to see your captive!" and she pointed to Isaac.

"What is he to you?" Gilbert demanded, angrily.

"He is my cousin!"

"What?"

"I say he is my cousin, Alfred Marshall!"

Once more Isaac made an effort to rise, and he came nearer succeeding than on any previous occasion.

"That name!" he exclaimed. "Surely, I have heard it before. Yes; it is familiar; it is no new thing to me. The name!—surely, it is—yes; it is mine! Great heavens! I am no longer a nameless creature! But what else am I? Ay, who am I?—what am I?"

His excited speech gave Gilbert a shock. The plotter trembled and could find nothing to say. He saw his cherished plans in danger; he saw more than that. State Prison stared him in the face.

Isaac was pressing his hand to his forehead, trying to grasp the lost past, but Viola looked only at Gilbert, and her gaze was stern and accusing. Her fear had gone when she marked Dunning's own dismay.

"Behold your work!" she exclaimed.

"He may yet recover," the guilty wretch faltered.

"Will it be your work if he does?"

"I have been mad, mad!" groaned Gilbert.

"If you repent, prove it by letting us all go free."

"To drag me to jail?"

"One word!" Viola exclaimed. "Is Harold Dunning as guilty as you?"

Gilbert did not answer. The question involved so much that he found no words for the occasion.

"I can't get at this," complainingly observed Isaac. "Tell me more of myself; tell me what I am! Did you say I was your—cousin?" and he still pressed his hand to his head.

"You surely are; the son of my father's sister."

"Even that gives me no light."

"Your mother was Mary Stowell. She married Maurice Marshall. You and I have seen each other but rarely, for we lived far apart;

but I should know you anywhere. The last I heard of you, you wrote you were to marry a New York girl, named Olive Osborne."

Isaac uttered a loud cry.

"Olive!" he exclaimed. "Ha! I remember, now! Olive!—my affianced wife! And this trouble of mine, this loss of mind and sense—"

Greatly excited, he turned his gaze upon Gilbert Dunning, again.

"It comes to me!" he added; "the past grows plain! You, you—I know you, at last! By my life! It was you who sought Olive's hand in vain, and swore to be avenged when you were rejected. And it was in this way you sought to carry out the oath!"

There was more in his excited speech than words could well describe; there was a power and pathos which made Gilbert reel and drop into a chair.

"I am undone!" he gasped.

"So you repent, at last," put in Viola. "Then, perhaps, you will allow us to go free?"

"No, no!" the schemer cried; "I have risked all on this matter, and I rise or fall on the result. Let you go?" Never! I say, never! I will keep you, though the hosts of the world stand in my way!"

"Then we will fight you to the bitter end!"

"Fight? And what can you do? You are as pignies in my hands."

"Mister, here's a feller what's a genooine old-time giant, an' dead ag'in' you. Let these folks go, you measly snake, or out goes yer candle. You hear me?"

And at the door stood Flipper Flynn, as cool and resolute as usual. By his side was Betty Gray, and it was not hard to arrive at the conclusion, which was perfectly correct, that she had released him. The Patrol now had a confident air, as if he had all fixed to suit him.

"Malediction! are you again at large?" Gilbert cried.

"I ain't no larger than common, but I be on deck. Yes, old boss, you are a done-up crook. Ketch on?"

"It is all due to you."

"Wrong! I reckon that Viola an' one Miss Betty Gray, ter wit, come in fer their share of glory. I should be in hock now ef it wa'n't fer my frien' Betty. Damsel, I say ter you, you're a baked brick!"

He shook hands with Betty, gravely. She looked bewildered, and did not see what reason they had to exult when they were still in the hands of the enemy. Flipper, however, had a theory of his own in the case. He did not think Gilbert would dare to try and carry on war against so many.

Just then Old Spicer made his reappearance. He was too much excited to notice that anything wrong was transpiring.

"Say, boss, read this!" he requested, nervously.

He held out a paper, but Gilbert waved it away impatiently.

"I have no time for such nonsense," he answered.

"But it's from Blogg, an' he says he has given us away; an' ef he has, where be we? Why, we're here, when we ought ter be som'ers else, by gum! Read it, read it!"

The paper was wildly waved, and Gilbert took it mechanically. It was not the work of a scholarly person, but it made its points as fully as if the work of erudition. It read as follows:

"DUNNING, AND OTHERS:—"

"I hate a sneak, and that's w'ot yore kaliber is. You tho't you was a smart feller when you took watter an' did me owt ov a jobb. Wal, you made a Big Blunder. Them who a'n't with Me is ag'in'st Me. See? Now, I have Told the pellice on you, an' you may expect them at your howse at any minnt. You kinder made a Blunder w'en you took w'atter, didn't you? Wal, you wa'te an' see. That's awl, frum your duttyfull Cirvant, who doan't take watter at awl, Mr. B. Blogg."

Gilbert was uncertain whether to take this as it proclaimed itself; it seemed almost impossible that any one should betray an affair in which he had taken a guilty part; but it was a fact that Blogg was vindictive to a surprising degree. While the reader hesitated footsteps sounded behind him, and he mechanically turned around.

This time he saw Mother Jacobs, and with her was Roger Hethington. The latter looked a little alarmed to see so many present, but Jacobs came to the point at once:

"Here's a man with somethin' ter say," she announced, in an ill-humored tone. "He is a kickin', but I told him you would settle his case right away."

Her manner indicated confidence that Mr. Hethington would be disposed of unceremoniously: she had not learned the trouble which was in progress. Now, however, she caught sight of

"Zylpha," and her eyes grew large and wondering.

Evidently, Roger was not ambitious to speak in such a crowd, for he remained silent, gazing from one to another of the party as if he wished himself well away. If he did not want to speak, he was in luck in one respect. A hand was unexpectedly laid on his shoulder, and a gentle voice inquired:

"Will you let us act as your attorneys, sir?"

"Howlin' hyenas!" shouted Flipper Flynn, "ef it ain't Mike Moran, I'm a measly liar!"

It was the detective, nor was he alone. Back of him stood Harold Dunning.

There were reasons why the coming of the latter meant more to some present than any detective could mean, and sight of him caused a lull as striking as it was ominous. Harold, however, did not long remain inactive. Striding forward, he faced his brother with contracted brow and well-lighted eyes.

"Gilbert," he spoke, in a deep voice, "if you have one grain of honor left, it is time for you to prove it. I have suffered for you, and ycu have made no effort to clear me. Now, convinced that I must save myself if I am saved at all, I am here to demand justice of you. It remains to be seen whether you will force me to use the severest measures. It rests with yourself."

Gilbert shrunk from the address and his face was pallid.

"What do you want?" he mumbled.

"The truth! You have allowed me to rest under a cloud, when one word from you would have cleared me. There are those who believe me a crook, and the ally of men of the very worst reputations. You have known I was thus wronged, yet you let it go on."

"I could not clear you without ruining myself," tremulously explained Gilbert.

"And so, rather than let a guilty person suffer for his misdeeds, you would make one who was innocent take his place as a sacrifice?"

Gilbert folded his hands, half-despairingly, half-angrily, as if he thought he was being misused.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"Justice, and no more. It is believed I have been your associate in certain crooked work you have done. Is this true?"

"From the time you followed me to New York our paths have been different. This was because I willed it so. As a result, you have known nothing of me or my business. I have gone my way; you have gone yours. If you have done anything illegal, I have not been party to it. If I have done wrong, you have had no hand in the matter."

"At the Cozy Cove Hotel you had trouble with a certain man who is now present—Roger Hethington. He was heard to use the name of Harold Dunning. Can you explain that?"

"I can!" cried Roger; "I knew him as a man who had done me wrong, and, with others, lately assaulted me. I knew his name was Dunning, and I thought it was Harold. I called him so, but I was wrong. I had only one companion, then, and he was Gilbert Dunning!"

Viola's face grew radiant and happy, but Old Spicer was the only person who could find words.

"Oh! won't you sweat fer that, me beauty!" he muttered.

Gilbert's eyes were flaming, now.

"Coward!" he vehemently exclaimed; "you would betray us, would you? Know, all, that Roger Hethington is a criminal at heart. He has an older brother, Lionel, who came to this country some time ago. Roger hired city crooks to kidnap him, so he (Roger) could enjoy the family property until he could steal enough of it to make himself solid at the expense of the older brother. The plot worked too well; the crooks played Roger false, and sent him word that unless he came on and paid hush-money they would turn to Lionel, ransom him out, and betray his false brother's share in the work. It was this brought Roger to America."

"Yes!" cried Roger, "and you are the leader of the crooks!"

"The pot calls the kettle black," interrupted Flipper Flynn. "Gents, you need not fight; we are dead onter the both on ye, b'jinks!"

"Correct!" agreed Detective Moran, who was content to remain silent for the time.

Viola went to Harold Dunning's side.

"I am ashamed to ask your forgiveness," she began, brokenly, but he interrupted:

"Why should you be? We have been the victims of circumstances. I certainly bear you no ill will."

"One thing I can say in extenuation of my sin in thinking ill of you—even when I regarded it

as proven, I could not believe my own evidence; and to-day I came here to risk my life in getting proof that you were, after all, innocent."

"Noble girl!"

There was no fear that they would fail to come to terms, but there was more to do elsewhere. The crooks were well entrapped, but they were in an ugly mood, and now Gilbert had confessed, Harold's brotherly feelings were likely to overcome all else and lead to a compromise. Whether this would be allowed by those who had no such feelings to move them was another matter.

Gilbert Dunning had gone astray when he came to New York from a small town, and had become the ally of crooks. His crimes of interest to this story had been two:

First, he had found a rival in Alfred Marshall, alias Isaac Moss, and given him a drug which had for the time taken his reason away.

Second, he had worked the case against the Hethingtons. Of the red stain in Gilbert's room, once mistaken for Roger's life-blood, it need only be said that it had been caused by a nose-bleed, and that, in spite of Flipper's fears, Roger had left the hotel with Gilbert willingly and safely. The gravestone warning had come to Roger from Gilbert.

The compromise fell through because the various disturbing elements were not content to let each other go free. The result was that Gilbert, Roger, Old Spicer, Mrs. Jacobs and Blogg alike went to Sing Sing to serve appropriate terms. Blogg, after his treachery, had sought to escape, but the drag-net took him in with the rest.

Lionel Hethington was found in a house in Hoboken, a prisoner, and duly released.

Harold Dunning was fully cleared of all suspicion, and his marriage with Viola was duly celebrated. It was a double wedding, too, for Alfred Marshall, alias Isaac Moss, having recovered his health and reason fully, was at the same time united to the lady of his choice, from whom Gilbert had tried so hard to separate him. Happiness had at last come to both couples.

Betty Gray was taken under "Isaac's" charge, sent to school, and in all possible ways befriended.

Last of all, Flipper Flynn received a money reward for his services which almost dazed him, and all of those he had helped so well vied with each other in giving him a substantial start in life. He well deserves the prosperity which is his daily companion.

THE END.

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